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ABSTRACT

MAKING DISCIPLES: APPLYING *STEPS TO CHRIST*  
IN THE GLENORCHY SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Mark Falconer

Adviser: Kenley D. Hall

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

### Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: MAKING DISCIPLES: APPLYING *STEPS TO CHRIST* IN THE  
GLENORCHY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Name of researcher: Mark S. Falconer

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Kenley D. Hall, DMin

Date Completed: January 2015

### Problem

The spirituality of a large percentage of church members at the Glenorchy church in Tasmania, is primarily based on knowledge about God with little concept of how biblical spirituality interacts with daily life. A recent Natural Church Development survey revealed passionate spirituality and loving relationships scored extremely low and revealed a profound need to engage spiritually with God on a daily basis. The members of Glenorchy Church have a high regard for Scripture and the writings of Ellen White, and therefore have read *Steps to Christ*, but few have experienced the transformational presence of God in their daily lives by practicing principles in *Steps to Christ*.

## Method

This project endeavored to construct, contextualize, implement, and evaluate a discipleship process in the Glenorchy Church, that utilized principles from *Steps to Christ* that lead to a transformational experience of God's presence in daily living. The project commenced with a two-day camp for the church members followed by a contextualized praxis in spiritual transformation based on *Steps to Christ*, that sought to build loving relationships and model devotional habits including reflective reading in a small group setting over 12 weeks with three follow-up sessions.

## Results

Through small groups, community was built by unvarnished shared stories that utilized an andragogy based teaching style. Intensity built up during "Stepping into scripture" and "Steps to Christ" that powerfully connected teaching with emotions that allows for sapience to emerge. The modeling and teaching of devotional habits and particularly reflective reading was helpful to mostly younger members. All of the participants seemed to intensify their devotional lives, however only those with a regular time, place, and ritual and therefore able to practice biblical spirituality, were able to rise above the clutter of everyday life to enjoy the fruits of the Spirit regardless of where they were on the knowledge or experiential continuum.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

MAKING DISCIPLES: APPLYING *STEPS TO CHRIST*  
IN THE GLENORCHY SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH

A Project Document  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Mark Falconer  
January 2015

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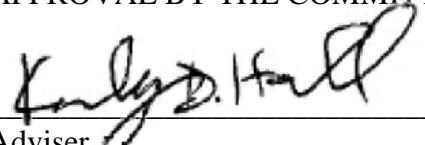
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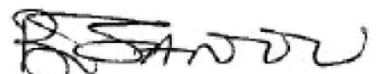
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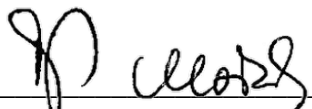
APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Adviser,  
Kenley D. Hall

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Allan Walshe

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Boubakar Sanou

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director, DMin Program  
Bruce L. Bauer

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean, Seventh-day Adventist  
Theological Seminary  
Jiří Moskala

May 26, 2015  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date approved

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Personal History**

My journey to join the Seventh-day Adventist was the culmination of my search to the question of “who am I?” It was a question I had asked myself since I was very young. A strong sense that I was a self-conscious person propelled me to seek an answer to this question, a search that started in earnest in my late teens. The search for this answer led me to explore different religions that included my family religion of Catholicism and Anglicanism, and then widened to Presbyterianism, and a brief alignment with the Elim Apostolic Church. I joined the Seventh-day Adventist when I was 22, my decision to join was based on acceptance of propositional truth. Although the search for truth still defines my journey, it now defines it in a completely different way to when I first joined the church.

There have been significant defining moments in my journey that have been formative, and a catalyst to life changing decisions that still inform my spiritual journey. A defining event came when I identified myself with the Elim Apostolic Church, my elation with speaking in tongues was not shared by an Adventist friend, whom I quickly and bluntly asked “why?” After his initial reticence, he eventually replied that it was of the devil. Startled at this prospect, it spurred me to search the Bible. As the differences

in teachings were uncovered it lead me to the conviction that I would miss the second coming of Jesus and so I aligned myself with the local Adventist church.

My initial elation upon joining the church quickly gave way to the confluence of theological tensions, incivility toward each other and an over-reliance on the writings of Ellen White that challenged my faith and convictions. Yet ultimately, my sense of conviction, loyalty and nurturing friendships kept my faith steadfast. After five years in the church there came a growing sense that God was calling me to ministry.

Ministry has afforded me many opportunities for service. I have served in five conferences in either pastoral appointments in the field or the Youth and Family Ministries department and combined with cross cultural ministry in the South Pacific Islands, this has contributed to a rich tapestry of experiences in my life. After 20 years in ministry these experiences have presented many defining moments. Ministry by its nature has blurred boundaries between personal life and the work of ministry at times—to the detriment of my personal life. I have gone through the heartache of a marital breakup that led to soul searching and questioned my role in ministry. To leave ministry would have only added to the maelstrom and despite misgivings from the conference hierarchy, I made the decision to stay, a decision I have never regretted.

The climactic moment in ministry came with concerns on *how* to connect people to God. During my time as a Conference Youth Director I observed that youth ministry seemed to be program based and lacked purpose. Thus, the message made little difference to behavior or choices in entertainment and lifestyle. Although many stated that there was an increased interest in spirituality amongst postmodern youth, it seemed that the personal pursuit of happiness took priority. Thus, there was a huge difference

between the life hoped in Christ and how one lived. This led to atrophic notions that ministry made little difference to people's lives. In spite of the church's efforts to bring new Christians and young people to Christ, the conventional practice of normative Bible study guides combined with a church culture that values adherence to well established boundary markers, led me to the conclusion that behavioral modification was the standard response. These observations were strengthened at camp meetings when there would be a general call for people to come forward to commit their lives to Jesus, but this would quickly fade when the individuals were contacted later.

Unable to fathom an answer to this dilemma, the pivotal moment for me came at a Dallas Willard Seminar where he articulated what Discipleship is and how the church had failed. When I asked Dr. Willard "How?," he replied "that is for you to determine how." Frustrated by his answer and lack of practical insight, I began to read Willard's books and other books on Discipleship. It was Willard's analogy that Christians are like Vampires that captured the essence of my observations, "I'd like a little of your blood, please. But I don't care to be your student or have your character. In fact, won't you just excuse me while I get on with my life, and I'll see you in heaven" (Willard, 2006, p. 14).

I came to the conclusion that we must re-discover biblical discipleship that leads to inner transformation and to lead, model, and inspire people to take the small steps needed to experience God which allows him the opportunity to transform our lives and experience spirituality in a wider variety of ways. This journey led me to enroll in the Doctor of Ministry program at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. This project has greatly assisted me in answering the question of "how" and therefore has been a real blessing personally and to my ministry.

### **Statement of the Problem**

For pastors, the administrative emphasis on baptisms often leaves little time or energy to focus on the impact and efficacy of disciple making. Consequently, the spirituality of a large percentage of church members is primarily based on knowledge about God and his teachings with little concept of how biblical spirituality interacts with daily life. On a recent Natural Church Development survey at the Glenorchy Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tasmania, passionate spirituality and loving relationships scored extremely low and revealed a profound need to engage spiritually with God on a daily basis. The members of Glenorchy Church have a high regard for Scripture and the writings of Ellen White, and therefore have read *Steps to Christ*, but few have experienced the transformational presence of God in their daily lives by practicing principles in *Steps to Christ*.

### **Statement of the Task**

The task of this project was to construct, contextualize, implement, and evaluate a discipleship process in the Glenorchy Church that utilizes principles from *Steps to Christ* that lead to a transformational experience of God's presence in daily living.

### **Justification for the Project**

The Glenorchy Seventh-day Adventist church has experienced steady decline from over 300 worshippers in the early 1990's to approximately 70 in 2013. This downturn must be arrested, and there is a hunger for spirituality amongst the members that feeds and connects them to God.

Traditionally in Australia, the primary mode for induction into the church is cognitive Bible studies, rather than modeling spiritual disciplines that help to incarnate the presence of God each day; and to my knowledge there is no discipleship process that primarily utilizes *Steps to Christ* as its base.

### **Description of the Project Process**

Theological reflection centered on the practice of biblical spirituality in three key areas. First, the nature of transformation of the heart. Second, the various biblical disciplines or practices that connect us to God and transform the heart. Finally, the difference between authentic and pseudo-transformation.

A review of selected literature, journal articles, published dissertations, and electronic data discussed the current practice of Adventist spirituality. Additionally, the spirituality promoted in the writings of Ellen White will be compared to selected literature on spirituality from outside of Adventism.

A contextualized praxis in spiritual transformation based on *Steps to Christ* was developed, implemented and evaluated in the Glenorchy Church. The process began with a two-day camp in March 2012, followed up with small group sessions meeting once a week for 12 weeks covering each of the chapters in *Steps to Christ*. There were three follow-up sessions three months apart with a final session at the end of the 12 months.

Finally, data from the participants' experiences were collected and assessed over the 12 months from the Camp and follow-up sessions through qualitative self-reporting instruments.

The project was completed in September 2013.



### **Expectations From the Project**

This project seeks a transformative experience for the members of Glenorchy Church that will not only impact their lives, but will also impact the ministry of the church. Further, it is hoped this project will help inform best practice for discipleship, and potentially equip pastors, Bible workers, and chaplains. The tools and findings will be made available to other conferences who will then have the option to inform their ministry teams.

On a broader scale, it is hoped that this project will help move the Seventh-day Adventist Church forward to be more intentional in the process of discipleship as we induct and nurture members into the Church, particularly following evangelistic outreaches.

This project will help me to understand better the processes involved in modeling and teaching biblical spirituality and thereby be more intentional in ministry.

Finally, this project will inform my preaching content toward a more balanced Gospel presentation.

### **Delimitations**

Spiritual growth is partially determined by developmental aspects and other socio-cultural factors such as familial relationships, individualism, and post-modernity, and as such these multi-dimensional factors interact with each other concurrently with various intensity, therefore are outside the scope of this study.

This project focused on the process of small groups rather than the broader context of the discipleship process at Glenorchy Church and research was limited to the responses of members from the small group.

This study was limited to the implementation of discipleship process at Glenorchy Church and to congregants who are over 18. Only those questions approved by the Internal Review Board (IRB) will be used for the interview.

The results of the study are not generalized to other ministerial contexts; however, principles can easily be adapted to different ministry contexts.

### **Limitations**

This project had a time limitation of 12 months as well as being limited to measurable outcomes from the small groups. Although this project was limited to the outcomes from small groups, there was a commitment to continue working through what it means to have discipleship at the core of ministry from kindergarten through to adult Sabbath school and evangelism.

The size and age profile of the Glenorchy Church has natural limitations. A worshipping congregation of only 65-70 members, and combined with an aging congregation this limit the number of potential participants entering small groups. However, discipleship is not about numbers, it is about the qualitative experience of the participants.

The implementation of a spiritual formation program was not the author's only responsibility; apart from the responsibility of being senior pastor of Glenorchy church a significant amount of time was required with other responsibilities that included pastoral care for a second church, Senior Chaplain at Hilliard Christian School, Executive Committee and Ministerial Secretary for the Tasmanian Conference.

Data was gleaned by way of interviews and therefore it is assumed the answers given are honest. Though confidentiality is assured, respondents may not have been

entirely candid or comfortable in divulging information about their spiritual lives. Although participants were genuine and honest in their responses, the interview data limited quantitative data.

This is the author's first experience at the implementation of a discipleship process. The implementation of the process early on during the Doctor of Ministry program meant learning elements along the way and therefore it is assumed, with experience and hindsight, that this impacted on the quality of the discipleship process.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Aretegenic:* This is theology whose primary function is to shape biblical virtues in believers (Charry, 1997, p. 57). Theology must rediscover its function to shape people's lives that moves beyond the modernistic pre-occupation with the intellectualization of faith. The power of aretegenic theology in sound teachings is its ability to shape believers through the power of God.

*Devotional Habits:* More often referred to as spiritual disciplines. The word discipline can have connotations to works so devotional habits is preferred as habits are practices such as reflective Bible reading, prayer, and solitude, which are windows into God's transformative presence.

*Disciple Discipleship:* Is the intentional pursuit of God, to follow him, be like him and through the Holy Spirit progressively transformed through the practice of devotional habits. The term discipleship is preferred to spiritual formation as this, within some Adventist circles, has become too controversial.

*Sapience:* Sapience is the pursuit of spiritual wisdom tradition that upholds correct knowledge, but sapience only occurs when knowledge is connected emotionally

with individuals. Sapience “emotionally connects the knower with the known” (Charry, 1997, p. 4) and this emotional connection creates attachment to knowledge.

*Spirituality:* Contemporary spirituality is often vague and disconnected from religion. Kuhalampi (2010) defines spirituality as “experience and appreciation of a dimension beyond the self” (p.25).

Spirituality is transcendence that connects with God, self, and others, that becomes ontologically significant through the transformative presence of God.

To experience spirituality provides hope, meaning, and values that bears the Christian fruit of “love joy peace gentleness goodness, faith, meekness and temperance” (Gal 5:22), and therefore the experience of spirituality is integral to discipleship.

## CHAPTER 2

### A THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

#### **Introduction**

Jesus dramatically announced the Kingdom is present (Luke 17:21) and available to all. However, availing oneself of the presence, and promises of the Kingdom is conditional upon the imperative for all to “seek first the Kingdom of God above all else, live righteously and he will give everything you need” (Matt 6:33; Luke 12:31). A theology of transformation is all about a relationship with God that connects with the messiness of everyday life, and this verse captures the essence of the response to God’s initiative of prevenient grace. However, acceptance of God’s gift depends largely, not only on formational and normative teaching, but it is the qualitative nature of the relationship through the Spirit that is critical to transformation. Paul states, “by the Spirit whom empowers our inner strength through the Holy Spirit and then Christ will dwell in our hearts who will make us complete” (Eph 3:16-19). Transformation that bears fruit is a process through the presence of the Spirit that begins to restore the image of Christlikeness lost in Eden to those who possess attitudes of honest intent, humility, consecration and repentance, who desire to understand and reform their inner motives (the reason why we do things) and drivers. Motives drive everything in our lives and it is the motives of the heart that needs to be transformed. Both Peter and Judas spent three and half years with Jesus and both betrayed Jesus, but it was Peter’s honest intention to worship and follow Jesus that will be seen as the important trigger to conversion, juxtaposed to Judas’ sinister motives to further his own goals that were finally exposed

by his lack of genuine repentance. A theology of transformation must essentially be sapiential and practical and the critical question of *how* to connect to an invisible God through core spiritual activities will be examined. Masking in juxtaposition to honesty, often blurs genuine fruitage with behavioral modification and so finally, this chapter will briefly canvas the differences between pseudo and genuine transformation.

### **Theological Basis for the Transformation of the Heart**

A theology of transformation at its very heart must connect to the messiness of everyday life as opposed to mere abstract concepts. Although truth and doctrine make sense in a rationalist and evidentialist world, Charry (1999, p. 4) argues eloquently for the rediscovery of sapiential theology where knowledge is only of penultimate importance, whereas sapience connects the student emotionally to the knowledge that becomes holistic, participatory, and transformational. What this means is that sapience combines with spiritual wisdom that transforms character in the community of believers with robust truth. Character renewal cannot happen without knowledge, and combined with personal participation and the presence of the Holy Spirit, this enables disciples to live out the truths, therefore and this is the artemogenic function of theology that provides the tools to live a Godly life that can be seen by all (p. 19).

The task of formulating a balanced theology of transformation is essential, and while Adventists have understood well what a sanctified person looks like, there is a large gap between what is known and how professed followers live. Identifying causes will assist to formulate a balanced theology. Vertallier (1993, p. 48) in his thesis observes that the Adventist Church is more concerned with a task of mission and eschatology centering on the initial accepting of Christ as our Savior. Tozer (2006)

observed a similar trend in evangelicalism, and warned that this leads to complacency and shallowness. The end result is that sin is relegated to the periphery with a disturbing “lack of holy desire” (p. 17). The acceptance of Jesus is only a slender part of Christianity and Vertallier laments that this has come at the cost of “preparing a spiritual people” (1993, p. 49). Carlson (2011, p. 207) observed in the Oak Hill church he pastored, members became accustomed to unformedness as normal, an ailment common to the western church. Consequently, there is a giant fissure between theology and everyday life (Charry, 1999, p. 236), with the concomitant decline in spiritual aptitude. Willard is more strident in his criticism of a conversion centered Gospel, for he rightly states that “inestimable harm is done when salvation is restricted to mere forgiveness of sins,” and consequently faith is constrained to occasional special acts, while puerile debates swirl around the exchange of mere ideas (Willard, 1991, pp. 31-33). It is little wonder that a transformational relationship with Christ that permeates every aspect of daily lives remains unintelligible when salvation is relegated to mere belief and the forgiveness of sins (pp. 33-34) and theology of transformation must redress this imbalance. How God wants a disciple to live will be the next question to explore.

### **The Life of a Disciple**

The call for Jesus’ disciples to lead godly lives is indeed a high calling. Paul admonishes those who confine their lives to mere exchange of ideas to “instead, train yourself to be godly” (1 Tim 4:7b). Peter echoes a similar challenge that disciples “must be holy in everything you do” (1 Pet 1:15), and Peter adds “God has given us everything we need for living a godly life” (2 Pet 1:3). During the process of the Christian journey it is not an option to choose to live life from a platter that suits a certain lifestyle or

preferences, nor is discipleship an option. Paul urges believers to stay the course “until Christ may be formed in you” (Gal 4:19) (Houston, 2011, p. 135). Yet these concepts “to be godly” and “to be holy” suffer under the burden of negativism that views them as merely refraining from evil, or worse, a lifestyle for eccentric monks living in the desert, and so holiness has become anathema to “postmodern” Christians.

Jesus intensified the challenge for disciples to live as he lived, and to serve as an example to others. Jesus stated in John 13:15 “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” This imperative Jesus gave “as I have done for you” is an injunction that Issler (2010, p. 161) links with the “just as” exhortations Peter and Paul made in 1 Peter 2:21 and Philippians 2:5 that serves as examples to follow. Disciples are to “have the same attitude just as Christ Jesus had” (Phil 2:5NLT). Peter states: “because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps,” and John counsels to abide in him and to “walk just as he walked” (1 John 2:6). Believers are also urged to imitate Paul’s example (1 Cor 4:16-17, 11:1; 2 Thess 3:7) in the context that Paul imitated Christ (1 Cor 11:1; 1 Tim 1:16); high standards indeed for Jesus’ disciples to emulate, but this is only one slice of the picture. Holiness, godliness, and the examples of Jesus and the apostles are injunctions that suffer the burden of mere abstractions that become aspirational and are therefore easily shrugged off by his followers. The question of how to be an example and to walk in Jesus’ steps each day and how this process becomes meaningful in every life, is the essential task of theology and sapience to articulate.



## **The Extent of the Sin Problem**

Holiness and transformation of the heart has become difficult to understand for many Christians for many are content with ungodliness and the murkiness of sin (Bingham, 1986 p. 20); therefore, it is essential to understand the sin problem. Although it is axiomatic that all have sinned (Rom 3:23; 5:12; 1 John 1:10), the extent and seriousness of the sin problem is not well apprehended. Adam and Eve lost their relationship with God and marred their relationship with each other (1 John 4:7, 8, 11). They desired to be self-sufficient and to find life apart from the perceived constraints of God and consequently the image of God was lost to sin and death resulted (Rom 5:12-17). Paul elaborates the nature of sin further in Colossians 1:21: “Sin is as evil thoughts and actions.” While sin includes not only actions and thoughts (Matt 5:27-48), the source of sin lies in the seat of the heart. Christ stated that it is from the heart where all “evil thoughts, murder adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony and slander” (Matt 15:19) emanate. It is the heart that becomes the key to understand genuine transformation. For it is the heart that influences thoughts, emotions, desires that translate to bodily actions. Jeremiah reminds us of how dangerous the heart really is: “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?” (Jer 17:9). The fact that he goes on to state that God “searches all hearts and examine secret motives,” demonstrates how corrupt the heart is and how impossible transformation is without the Spirit.

The desire of sin seeks “what I want” and “cares for nothing else but its own satisfaction” (Willard, 2008, p. 82). Jesus and Peter both state that all are enslaved by sin and therefore behind good deeds can lie corrupt motives, often hidden to all except God

(John 8:34 2; Pet 2:20). This is important for when one seeks transformation it is about the transformation of the human spirit, the will or the heart. It is the right action of the will that is essential, yet though one cannot change the heart by oneself, a person can choose to follow Christ. The stakes are high, for Paul warns: “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (Rom 8:13), and so the human nature must come under the Spirit’s control. What this means in practice is that the individual has the ability to choose to serve Jesus despite sin, and importantly, living a godly life occurs within the safe framework of grace that is not contingent on works (Eph 2:8-9). The next verse states “we are Gods handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works” (v. 10). The fact that Christians are God’s handiwork is indicative that transformation is a journey and a process that occurs in relationship with God when there is meaningful connection. Training to be godly is not about behavioral modification or mere ascent to prescribed beliefs for the problem of sin is too deep, so the question arises as to how can this be a reality in the messiness of everyday life? To answer this, the Old Testament (OT) provides clues from the teaching of the Sanctuary where God sought to dwell amongst the Israelites.

### **Transformational Clues From the Sanctuary**

The Sanctuary contains the message of salvation through the annual sanctuary services that ultimately pointed to the coming of Jesus (substitutionary sacrifice), the cleansing of sin (priestly mediation) and the final judgment (General Conference, 2005, p. 349). The cleansing of sin and the separation of clean and unclean was an essential function of the Sanctuary (Lev 16) that illustrated God’s desire to cleanse his people from

sin. What is of critical importance here is the fact that God's theophany was not only awesome and frightening to the Israelites, but it was God's desire to dwell amongst his people and to cleanse them from sin. God manifested himself during the Exodus, at Mount Sinai in the pillar of cloud and then requested the Israelites to construct a Sanctuary so he would dwell amongst them (Exod 25:8; 29:45) and so his presence filled the Sanctuary. This expresses God's strong desire to establish his presence with his people he bought out of Egypt. What of disciples today?

Averback (2008, p. 39) writes of the qualitative relationship God desires with his people and makes the fascinating connection between God who "tabernacles" with his people in the OT and Christ who came in the flesh. John stated that Jesus "made his dwelling [tabernacle] among us" (John 1:14) (p 39), so Jesus' incarnation or "tabernacle" is now with human flesh where Jesus manifested his glory to all is similar to the language used in the OT when God revealed himself in the Sanctuary. As powerful as Jesus' incarnation was, Jesus' ministry was limited physically which is why he promised the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17) to all. Paul provides the key to understanding the relationship with God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Relationship is about the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit and Paul states, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Cor 3:16-17). The significance of this is that the holiness of God through the Holy Spirit unites with human flesh where he dwells in the hearts of his disciples. Paul reiterates for clarity in vs 17, "for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple." The same God who dwells in the hearts of his followers enables his disciples to live godly lives and to "be holy in every way" (1 Thess 5:23).

While relationship with God is qualitative by nature, what does this really mean in practical terms? To describe God's relationship with his people, the OT regularly uses the word *yada*, which means "to know." For instance, Psalm 139 describes God knowing when we sit, rise, the discernment of our thoughts, and foreknowledge of what we speak (Idleman, 2011, p. 48). This is the same word that is used to describe an intimate relationship between couples (Gen 4:1, 17). As the intimacy of this relationship is developed, so the hiddenness of God is revealed through mutual self-revelation (Issler, 2001, p.16) in a similar way to couples gradually revealing their hiddenness. The quality of this relationship is contingent on the believer's willingness to connect with God in meaningful ways, for God promised, "Come near to God and he will come near to you" (Jas 4:8). The quality of the relationship is essential to restore the image of God, and the intensity of this relationship that God desires is emphasized in Romans 8:11 "the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you" and it is the Cross that demonstrates God's love for humanity. When a disciple is in a dynamic relationship with Jesus, it is "the Holy Spirit that empowers our inner strength as Christ makes his home in our hearts" (Eph 3:16-17). Although the quality of the relationship with Jesus is essential, sin and worldly desires still wage war on the soul (1 Pet 2:11), which leaves the disciple with the uncomfortable tension between the call to live a godly life in the reality of daily life. It is this tension that will now be examined.

### **Godly Living in the Realities of Daily Life**

Ghandi was reported to have said: "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians, and they are so unlike your Christ," (Daniels, 2013, p. 1). Though the source or context of this quote is unknown, it does capture the widely-held perception that Jesus'

followers do not live up to what they believe. Christianity is not a destination; it is a journey where transformation is progressive, for Paul states “our Spirits are being renewed every day” (2 Cor 4:16 NLT). There is a spiritual battle that wages on. Paul writes of his spiritual battle: “but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me,” (Rom 7:23), and to the Galatians Paul writes (5:17): “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, they are in conflict with each other, so that you are not free to do whatever you want.” How is this understood in the light of the call to be holy? Nelson’s (2011) answer to this tension is interesting, he argues eloquently for a theology of imperfection stating that: “believers need to plan to be sinners for the rest of their lives yet do so without planning to sin” (p. 86), which captures precisely the tension between being called to be holy and the reality of war with the flesh in everyday life. So, in the context of a relationship with Jesus, the re-orientation of thoughts, feelings, underlying motives and attitudes are progressive. The key question is how does a Holy God exist in the life of a person where sin and warfare rages on? Two examples are the lives of Judas and Peter who both spent three and half years with Jesus but with tragically different results.

### **Peter**

Although Judas’ betrayal is portentously juxtaposed to Peter’s denial, there are crucial differences. Peter, when called by Jesus immediately responded (Luke 5:6-8) and became a prominent disciple. Murray (1895, p. 28) characterized Peter as self-serving, self-willed, a man who trusted in his own wisdom about divine things (Matt 14:28) and tried to prevent Jesus from dying on the cross (Matt 16:22). Peter was egotistical, he wanted to be the greatest (Mark 9:34) and sought reward for following Jesus (Matt

19:27). Despite these character flaws, Peter was ready to pledge absolute faithfulness and even willing to die with Jesus (Matt 26:33-35; Mark 14:30-31; Luke 22:33-34). Although these encounters helped formed Peter, it was Peter's denial that was the crucible of pain that finally led to his conversion (Matt 26:75) when he wept bitterly. He discovered how fickle the human will and heart is and realized the need to surrender his will through the Holy Spirit. The warfare did not end there and though Peter became one of the greatest leaders of the Christian church, he was guilty of a serious error of judgment (Gal 2:11-19). However, it is Peter's continued relationship with Jesus, coupled with his intention and motivation to always follow Jesus that allowed the process of formation to continue through the Holy Spirit, which was able to shape his will. When Jesus restored him in John 20, his nature was changed even though the battle continued.

## **Judas**

In Judas's case, this was not so. Formation took place, but it was in the wrong direction despite the best of formative and normative teachings. Judas was self-willed, ambitious (John 13:27-30), proud (Mark 9:33-37), and a thief who coveted money (John 12:6). Until his betrayal, the other disciples were unable to discern his heart or his underlying motives until they came to fruition. It appears Judas never truly believed (John 6:64, 70, 71), for it is significant that nowhere does Judas call Jesus Lord, for the highest title he addressed Jesus was Rabbi (Matt 26:49). It therefore can be inferred that Judas never surrendered his self-will and hid his impure motives. For instance, when Mary washed Jesus feet with expensive perfume Judas exclaimed altruistically the money should be given to the poor (John 12:4-6). Ironically it was Mary who recognized Jesus and the value of Jesus' gift of life, juxtaposed to Judas' dire spiritual state. After the

resurrection, the nature of his heart was revealed for all to see when he was declared to be the “son of perdition” (Matt 17:12) a tool of the devil (Luke 22:3). Like Peter, Judas repents but the repentance did not lead to life but death. Matthew is the only Gospel that records Judas’ repentance (Matt 27:4) when he exclaims “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” Was this repentance or expression of guilt? The word repentance is translated from *metamelomai*, which expresses remorse which is dramatically different to the repentance (*metaneo*) of Peter. The critical difference between remorse of Judas (*metamelomai*) and *metaneo* is that the latter means change of heart toward sin or a specific sin, whereas remorse only expresses regret. In Judas’ case, when events did not transpire as he hoped, he only confesses remorse or regret to the priests (Wilkins, 2004, p. 868). This is a dreadful outcome that stemmed from the spiritual deficiency of being self-willed and ultimately Judas gave into his passions for money. Judas is condemned, not for his suicide, but for his unwillingness to humble himself and to repent of his sins, which were important differences between Judas and Peter, but this is not the full story.

### **The Nature of the Human Will**

There are still more layers to peel away to understand the nature of the human will, for though both Peter and Judas were motivated by fleshly desires; they both were gripped by self-will that goes to the heart of sin. According to Paul, flesh is motivated by desires (2 Pet 1:4); desires seek gratification and consequently, the “will” sacrifices good in order for the desires to be satisfied. Willard (2008, p. 82) argues the overriding need for the satisfaction of desires is the inherent weakness of the will and therefore desires are chaotic (Jas 4:1-3). Willard further argues that the core of the spiritual battle is between “what I want” that stems from the impulsive will, while reflective will is driven not by

desire but “what is best” (p. 82). Therefore, to grow spiritually, impulsive will must give way to reflective will for when the Holy Spirit combines to change and to imbue the follower with reflective will, this will lead to a victorious Christian life.

Willard identifies an additional layer of the will the “embodied will.” When the embodied will is governed by the “impulsive will,” it is enslaved by sinful desires that will automatically respond to a situation without thinking. However, the embodied will governed by reflective will, resembles qualitatively the character of Jesus in the sense that overall thoughts and feelings naturally emerge constructively during the quotidian life. As a Christian grows the reflective will drives the power of choice, which will in turn embed itself into the psyche that matures to become the embodied will when it is well ordered through the discipleship process shaped by the Spirit. Equally, at the other end of the spectrum, when embodied will is not motivated by the Spirit, the impulsive will embeds habits that bypass the reflective will and therefore act impulsively to seek the satisfaction of worldly desires (Speak, 2008, p. 209), as illustrated in the case of Judas.

Willard claims Peter was gripped by impulsive embodied will when he denied Christ three times because he had not reflected on the situation before he denied Jesus, and so after denial he discovered the true nature of his will. However, while it is at this moment that Peter does indeed come face to face with his sinful nature, reflective embodied will only describes what the mature Christian looks like. All, to some degree, will struggle with impulsive embodied will at times as this is the nature of the spiritual battle of sin that rages on in all. There is still yet another layer to be considered that is more helpful to understand how Christians battle with sin and why God seems to “wink” at sin and that is the layer of “honest intention” that rises above the murky underlying



motives that assists to explain the difference between Peter and Judas. This, however, is only relevant in the context of a grace filled relationship empowered by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of his disciples.

Peter and Judas indeed come face to face with their sinful nature and whether it is embodied or not is not the right question, but what were their motives? Both Peter and Judas battled with their sinful desires and both were gripped by the weakness of human nature, yet they both were in relationship with Jesus and were allowed to grow and fall and so what was the difference? Tozer (2006) makes the intriguing argument that the essential driver of Christians to seek his Kingdom, in the mire of sin, is their “honest intent” (p. 99). Tozer makes the uncomfortable observation that God seems to “wink” at the weaknesses of his followers where there is honest intent. This is true of Peter, Abraham, Samson, Elijah to name a few (Tozer, p. 99). Clearly perfection of character is unattainable this side of glorification, so therefore honest intention to seek God’s Kingdom is a critical motivator. It is clear that Peter always possessed that honest intention that was demonstrated by his acknowledgement as a sinner (Luke 5:8) and the desire to be clean (John 13:9), dropping his fishing nets to follow (Mark 1:18), his desire to die with Jesus was genuine at the time (Mark 14:31), even though he betrayed Jesus only a few hours later. This desire came from a sense of indebtedness to Jesus and the recognition Jesus was the Messiah (Matt 16:16) unlike Judas who recognized him only as Rabbi. Honest intention motivated by worship is able to cut through the complex layers of sinful motives of envy, jealousy, ambition, which emanates from deep inside the heart to repent and make a full surrender even while the battle of the will rages on. Judas did not possess honest intention but with a slight of hand betrayed his altruistic motives (John

12:4-5) to advance *his* own ambitions. Honest intention must come with attitudes of fearing God (respect of his majesty and who he is, Isa 2:10), humility and repentance that emanates from surrender, characteristics that were missing in Judas' case. Honest intention allows mistakes, but the over-riding driver to seek first the kingdom of God above all else must be present.

Honest intention acknowledges the reality of the everyday battle. There are clear injunctions in the scriptures calling for obedience, to be blameless holy and spotless (See Gen 17:1; Lev 21:18; Deut 7:6; 18:13; Ps 15:2; Prov 28:18; Rom 1:27; 6:19; 15:16; Eph 1:18; Phil 1:10; Titus 1:6). Yet there are lingering imperfections amongst people of the Bible where many of the OT characters such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David had dubious moments in their lives. Indeed, allowances are to be made for each other's faults (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13). Nelson (2011) speaking on the paradox of spiritual growth makes the pertinent observation that while one is being formed all need "to be content to be in process as disciples grappling with sin" (p. 85), as opposed to living up to the burden of the unobtainable goal of perfection. This does not mean that sin does not matter, a question Paul was directly addressing with his rhetorical question: "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" (Rom 6:1). Paul expected the answer to be no. To grapple with sin was a process that Peter had to contend with after his conversion, he still struggled with prejudice (Gal 2:9-12) a sin Paul publically rebuked Peter over. Too many become discouraged when they look at the destination and forget the journey is the work of God, but endurance does require effort.

Since the "process" is in partnership with the Holy Spirit, right attitudes and motives are essential. Since we cannot know our hearts thoroughly, it is only the Spirit

that can reveal hidden faults (Ps 19:12), and motives (Prov 20:27). Motives are often clouded with pretense making oneself look better than he/she really is (Matt 15:7-8; 22:18, 23:13), pride hypocrisy, manipulation all lurk beneath. While it is impossible to uncover all the layers of motives in the heart, however “holy intention” coupled with the Spirit is essential to understanding hidden motives. Tozer (2006) was right when he stated motive is everything, for it is not what a person does that is critical, “it is why he does it” (p. 121). The work of sanctification and sapience is when the soul through spiritual activities responds to the Spirit and uncovers the layers of unhealthy motives and with an attitude of humility, repentance and a teachable spirit allows the soul to gradually be transformed into the image of Christ.

When Jesus dramatically announced the arrival of the Kingdom of God (Luke 17:21) he challenged disciples that, “whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). The cross is a symbol of death, suffering, humiliation and sacrifice (Idleman, 2011, p. 159). Honest intention to follow Jesus will embrace such challenges. When one takes up the cross to follow Jesus their faith will not waiver when calamity strikes. Unfortunately, when the primary value is to be as comfortable as possible this does not prepare people to take up their cross.

### **Biblical Practices That Assist in Connecting the Heart to God**

Within the human heart there lurks a natural inclination toward sin and degeneracy, and for the transformational process to be in place there needs to be an intentional spiritual plan that aligns the life to allow spiritual activities that Jesus himself observed in order to be strengthened, nourished and most importantly to remain in fellowship with the Father (Willard, 2002, p. ix). The core practice of discipleship and

theology is to offer practical guidance on the “how to” of spiritual growth, or how to have a relationship with an invisible God. Disciplines as such, sound like works, but Porter defending disciplines from the accusation that they are works of righteousness quotes Laubach “I have done nothing but open windows and God has done all the rest” (Porter, 2008, p. 143). This statement captures beautifully the purpose for disciplines. In other words, for disciplines to be of value this requires well-ordered intentions to open the windows to God, such as worship, fasting, prayer, reflective reading to name but a few. The need for disciplines is recognition of the weakness of the flesh and that transformation is the work of God. There are a number of disciplines that can be practiced, but the core practices of worship, prayer, meditation and reflective reading will be examined. These spiritual activities are clearly interlinked and are practiced together.

### Worship

Worship is more than the intellectual assent to God’s sovereignty. The locus of the covenant between God and his people is worship as found in the Shema, “The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul” (Deut 6:4-5). This must form the core to the “wholistic response” (Dybdahl, 2008, p. 25), to God’s prevenient grace and his presence that involves the entire being of the worshipper. Worship is the attribution of worth to God through praise, exaltation and adoration (Kidder, 2009, p. 32).

When Jesus was offered the kingdoms of this world if He worshipped the devil, Jesus rebuked him: “For it is written you must worship the Lord your God and serve him only” (Matt 4:10) and therefore worship, allegiance and service are the core response to God’s grace. It is God’s greatest desire to be with his people and it was for that reason

God brought the Israelites out of Egypt that they may worship him (Exod 3:12; 4:23; 7:16). Fidelity to God was basic to this relationship and therefore they were forbidden to worship any other gods (Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9). Although worship is at the heart of the response to God, worship can be meaningless. Jesus perceived the hypocrisy of the worship of the Pharisees when he stated, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Matt 15:8), therefore their worship was from selfish motives (Calhoun, 2005, p. 45). What identifies genuine worship?

When Isaiah was in the Temple he heard the angels singing “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa 6:1-8), he was over-whelmed by God’s revelation and out of his sense of unworthiness he was moved to confession of sins and was pardoned immediately. Isaiah’s response was worship and service and it was from his conversion his ministry began (Kidder, 2009, p. 13). Kidder calls this pivotal moment a “relational event,” (p. 21) where Isaiah was remade and responded with the “adoring response to God as a sinner saved by grace” (p. 21), that arose from genuine worship from the heart, demonstrated by confession, devotion and the fruits of service.

For worship to be a genuine relational event, submission is essential and adoration leads to submission for it recognizes the majesty of God (Kidder, 2009, p. 32). It is not mere words of praise and adoration God desires to hear, but genuine words that emanate from deep within the heart with the right attitude that are the primary holistic responses (Matt 22:37-38) to God’s free gift of grace (Dybdahl, 2008, p. 24) that creates the atmosphere for divine inter-change. Central to worship is an attitude of reverence, a desire to praise, glorify, and honor God with the expectation to encounter God rather than merely accepting or to acknowledge belief (p. 28). Worship is not only corporate, but is

also personal. For personal worship to be meaningful, various devotional habits/disciplines must be intentional and regular, in order to experience God's presence.

### Repentance

Confession of sins, motives, thoughts and actions are contingent to forgiveness and cornerstone to a maturing disciple (Issler, 2001, p. 83), for it is a reminder of the human sinful condition and the broken relationship. Repentance means to turn or return to God (2 Chr 7:14), but in the NT the verb *metanoeo*, means "to change one's mind" (Matt 3:5-12) sharpens repentance to describe a radical change not just in actions but in attitudes (Bromley, 1988, p. 136). Repentance is not merely mental ascent to wrongdoing, but confesses sin (basic allegiance to God) and sins (specific acts and motives), that births a profound change in attitude through the enlightenment and transformational presence of the Holy Spirit. Without repentance, this would render null and void all other devotional habits.

Martin Luther's protest by nailing the 95 theses on the church doors in Wittenberg was to call for the entire life to be one of repentance (Kolb, 2009, pp. 20-21). Repentance with attitudes of humility and honesty are essential to opening the window to God. Since lives are lived out with what is in the heart, there are deeply ingrained sinful attitudes, motives and values that need to be supplanted with God's character. Issler (2009, p. 197) recounts how he overcame contempt for inconsiderate drivers (no doubt a ubiquitous ailment) and each time he would confess his sin, thank God for his grace and mercy and invite his peace to wash over him (Phil 4:7). He states that over the months of repeating this ritual, he noticed that the time between hurling contempt and the recognition of anger became shorter until he became aware of contempt welling up

*before* and finally, he came to a point where he no longer felt anger at inconsiderate drivers. This demonstrates the process of change through repentance, humility and co-operation with the Holy Spirit with the expectation that the Spirit will transform underlying attitudes. Though this may seem a minor matter, these incidences are governed by underlying attitudes that manifest themselves in everyday situations. Repentance when combined with honest intention and the Holy Spirit, assists disciples to uncover hidden motives of jealousy, selfishness, greed and other layers of motives, (Ps 26:2). Honesty here is crucial for it is able to discern and rise above the hypocrisy of what Solomon observed, “People may be pure in their own eyes but the Lord examines their motives,” (Prov 16:2). This text begins to strip away at the masks that are worn daily. However, there is an additional layer to repentance that is even more fundamental.

Repentance recognizes who God is and the sinfulness of human beings, (Dybdahl, 2008, p. 32) and although confession of individual sins is necessary, the core of repentance deals with our fundamental allegiance. Repentance has little value if one confesses a sin, but they are determined to follow their own direction (p. 34). It is crucial therefore for the disciple to discover how impotent the soul is without allegiance to God and without strength of the Holy Spirit (Sweet, 2012, p. 161).

### Solitude

Solitude and silence are devotional habits that go hand in hand. Solitude and silence is an intentional devotional habit that involves disengaging from daily life along with the ‘internal noise’ from daily life for a time in order to commune with God in worship through reflection on scripture, prayer, and meditation.

Silence and solitude as a discipline is not an activity for physical or mental restoration, though it may have this benefit, but is fundamental to slowing down to hear the still small voice (Ps 46:10) and to recognize a true sense of self to replenish the soul (Dybdahl, 2009, p. 93).

Plummer (2009) cites the lack of scriptural imperatives for solitude (p. 110) and cautions that silence and solitude may inadvertently over- emphasize the absence of noise rather than the necessary ingredients to engaging in prayer and scripture. Nouwen (2010, p. xxv) rightly cites the normative qualities engaging with scripture in silence, “without silence the Word of God cannot bear fruit”, yet without intentional time in solitude, a follower will not be able to transcend the grind of everyday life and will be confined to nominal Christian experiences (Moore, 2009, p. 6). Jesus found it necessary to be alone, for after feeding of the 5000 he went up to the hills to pray” (Matt 14:23). Jesus, according to the Gospel of Mark left the house alone early in the morning to engage in prayer (1:35), and before he chose his disciples he spent all night alone in prayer (Luke 6:12); following the death of John the Baptist he departed to the dessert to be alone, and so solitude created the place for prayer. Solitude and prayer are formative to the Christian character and fundamental to develop fellowship with God that helps to discern between the voices of the world and the voice of God. Solitude gives rest for the soul (Mark 6:31) and prepares the soul for the big challenges, just as Gethsemane prepared Jesus for the cross (Matt 26:36-46) and the 40 days of solitude prepared him for the temptation (Matt 4:1-11). Bonhoeffer (1954) captures the efficacious link between the normative function of silence and the fruit of the worship when he states: “We keep



silence solely for the sake of the Word, and therefore not in order to show disregard for the Word but rather to honor and receive it” (p. 79).

Solitude forces worshipers to slow down, to extricate one from technology, to resist the insatiable desire to multitask and consequently takes the urgency out of life that ultimately creates space for an undivided heart (Moore, 2009, p. 7). Solitude puts the earthly life in perspective to eternity (Willard, 1988, p. 161), and confronts the vulnerability and foibles of human nature, for Jonas quoting Nouwen observes: “we paradoxically realize our unity with others” (Jonas, 2009, p. 106). This is why disciples are formed in community. Finally, Calhoun (2005, p. 112) simply states the value of solitude as the place where “the heart waits for God.”

### Prayer

Today, secularization and rationalism has left little room for prayer. However, prayer within the covenantal relationship with God is the heart of worship and the hearthstone to the spiritual life (Bingham, 1986, p. 9). Prayer is about transparent communion and intimate conversation (Ogden, 2007, p. 49) with God that connects to every part of our lives. Prayer affirms God’s omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence that is expressed in worship with adoration, praise, confession, and supplication with an attitude of humility.

To view prayer as merely a discipline would be to diminish the value of prayer. Jesus relished the opportunity to pray to the Father (Mark 1:16, 35; John 5:19-30), (Mark 6:45, 46) and often prayed alone. When Jesus anguished with what lay ahead in Gethsemane, he captured the essential attitude to discover the will of the Father (Hull, 2006, p. 294), for he prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not

my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). Jesus sought above all else the will of the Father be done, despite inclinations otherwise. Prayer is the pathway that seeks God’s will, and an opportunity to glorify, praise and adore him; ultimately, transformation is a direct outcome of prayer (Willard, 1988, p. 185). Prayer brings God into our everyday experiences, thus Paul’s counsel “to pray continually” (1Thess 5:17; cf Phil 4:6). Prayer brings the experience of God to work and play.

Prayer provides the opportunity to worship and affirm the holiness and majesty of God, to affirm our dependence and debt, which keeps followers humble. Though by grace, God regards his disciples as holy, prayer is the opportunity to confess and admit sin reigns in our lives. (Bingham, 1986, p. 24). Prayer is the opportunity to worship, (Ps 48:9); to praise (Pss 9:1; 18:46) to rise above selfishness, and to reflect on his will (Joshua 1:8; Ps 119:117). Prayer seeks forgiveness with the expressed future intent to follow his will and live righteously.

### Study and Reflective Reading

Reflective reading is a practice that meditates and applies the mind to scripture or a sacred subject with the motivation to honor God’s sovereignty with a desire to do his will. Yuille (2012, p. 35) persuasively argues that Swinnock, a non-conformist puritan, says that meditation or reflection on scripture with the presence of the Holy Spirit is necessary to bridge the gulf between cognition and the heart. For Swinnock, reflection on scripture is not merely about information, it is the instrument by which “the Holy Spirit effects our union with Christ” and the means by which “God imparts grace to us” (Yuille, 2012, p. 54). With this in mind, true study of scripture involves cognitive study that may include exegesis, but also must include personal involvement with the art of

listening to God that leads to insight and analysis of our lives (Dybdahl, 2008, p. 67), that ultimately transforms the heart.

The study of Scripture and reflective reading facilitates worship and transformation (Averbeck, 2008, p. 33), but they have different functions. Informational study is important for it contributes to understanding of salvation and the character of God. However, formational reading utilizes reflective reading that more directly opens the heart to God in an effective way that leads to transformation thereby bridging the gulf between the head and the heart that engulfs the soul. Reflective reading typically focuses on smaller blocks of scripture for there is little to be gained by reading large portions of scripture. White, speaking of the Bible as the source of nourishment for the soul agrees.

There is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the scriptures. One may read the Bible through, and yet fail to see its beauty or to comprehend its deep and hidden meaning. One passage studied until its significance is clear to the mind, and its relation to the plan of salvation is evident, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view, and no positive instruction gained.” (White, 1892, p. 90)

When passages of Scripture are meditated and reflected on (Josh 1:8), with the Spirit’s presence (John 14:16-17), a refuge for the soul is found (Ps 91:1-2) and the opportunity for God’s image to be restored. Isaiah states, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways” (55:8), and Philippians 2:5 states we are to have the same attitude toward one another as Christ had, (Phil 2:5), and the best way for the meeting of the minds horizontally and vertically is reflective reading. Reflective reading must begin with request for the presence of the Holy Spirit through asking simple questions that seek application and insight into the text and self. As an example: (a)

What the text is saying? (b) What is the text saying to me? (c) What is God's invitation to me? It is the application questions that provide insights into the motives of the heart.

Hawkins and Parkinson (2011, p. 23) were the researchers behind the Reveal survey that surveyed 250,000 people in 1000 churches to identify factors that contributed to spiritual growth. They were surprised that reflective reading of Scripture had the greatest impact on spiritual growth in contrast to informational reading. Reflective reading is an important window into God's transformative presence.

### Meditation

Unfortunately, fear and misconceptions about mediation have led to its' disregardance; biblical meditation takes place in the heart and is best practiced in an atmosphere of silence, but is not necessarily a practice of silence. The focus of meditation is God, his majesty (Ps 143:5; 145:5), his promises (Ps 119:15), and the law with its precepts (Josh 1:8) (Bromley, 1986, p. 306). The NT calls for people to "*consider* the lilies of the field" (Matt 6:28), and to "*hear* these words" (Matt 7:24) and so the imperative for believers is to muse over, ponder, or remunerate, which effectively means to meditate in order to glean insight and application from Jesus' teachings (Dybdahl, 2008, pp. 57-58). Meditation, an inherently reflective activity, interlinked with reflective reading and prayer becomes a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practice (Yuille, 2012, p. 37).

Meditation opens the window to discern God's voice more clearly (Foster, 1989, p. 37). Meditation is not about emptying the mind; it is about filling ourselves with his presence to mull over God's word and to seek application, as the Psalmist states: "Within

your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love” (Ps 48:9). Meditation is a formational aspect of worship and study.

For Jews, prayer in its fullest practice included meditation on Scripture, (Dybdahl, 2008, p. 57), for meditation provides strength for spiritual battles ahead. Meditation requires a thoughtful process. When Jesus called his followers to listen, Jesus did not want them to just hear it, he wanted them to thoughtfully consider and apply it. Meditation is essential to that process (p. 59). Whitney (2003, p. 63) makes the direct link with meditation on scripture with transformation, “it is not what we read that transforms, it is what we remember” (p. 63). To remember requires reflection.

### **Difference Between Pseudo and Authentic Transformation**

The fact that transformation is not the norm is indicative of the fact that toxic relationships are often accepted as normal and people dismiss it: “that is OK, it is only Jack he is always like that.” This is a failure to apprehend life as a transformative journey with God who expects change.

There are two extremes that lead to pseudo-transformation. First, legalism or moral formation that seeks moral formation by relying on self *as the source* without the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, (Preston, 2010, p. 208). Second, transactional grace where Jesus paid it all, that consequently makes no further demand on Christians that leads to what Hull calls “passivity” (Hull, 2010, p. 290) and the compartmentalization of faith.

The classic Adventist hymn “Trust and obey for there is no other way” best reflects the simple message that has underpinned the traditional method for spiritual growth in Adventism that was measured by adherence to well recognized boundary

markers that often led to legalism. In reaction to perceived legalism, cheap grace seeped in. The danger is that externalism becomes the pathway to grow spiritually and this was Paul's complaint to the Galatians. They started out in faith, but they were trying to be perfected *epiteliesthe* (to make perfect) by works of the flesh (Gal 3:3) through works of the Torah (Coe, 2008, p. 59). While few overtly pursue salvation by works, the temptation is to pursue "sanctification by our own efforts" (p. 59). Maxson (2012, p. 23) insightfully posits that most Adventists are "compelled" to obey to assuage guilt and shame from failure in order to make ourselves more acceptable to God. However, motivation out of fear, guilt and obligation will not lead to growth God desires. Coe warns that when failure inevitably comes, the response is "*I* [emphasis added] must do better" (2008, p. 65). Moralism misunderstands the depth of the sin problem, and tends to view sin merely as misdeeds that results in behavioral modification. White comments on the futility of behavioral modification that it may "produce an outward correctness of behavior, but will not change the heart" (White, 1892b, p. 20). This externalized behavior is at odds with biblical spirituality that seeks radical change of the heart that understands the dynamics of spiritual growth (Porter, 2008, p. 142) that nurtures the heart (1 Cor 3:7).

Authentic transformation of the heart is underpinned by grace and importantly the journey is empowered by grace that intentionally seeks the transformative presence of the Kingdom of God above all else and to serve him. On the other hand, pseudo-transformation too often centers on a prescriptive religion that seeks to fulfill the demands of religious culture and local boundary markers. The legalist mind will use the disciplines as one more technique to conquer (Willard, 2002, p. 52), and will mask

dysfunction in contrast to the honest intention that seeks to understand impure motives, and seeks the image of Christ to be imbued into the soul.

It is not enough to just “believe,” for even the demons believe, (Jas 2:19) for discipleship is not optional. To be a follower of Jesus requires dedication to him personally. Jesus never mocked the Torah, but made it clear that there was no salvific value in adherence to the Law, as there are not enough rules and regulations to apply to every situation (Sweet, 2012, p. 80). The measure of discipleship is not how perfectly the law is kept. Disciples shall be known by their fruits derived from God (Matt 21:43; Luke 6:44) and the love they have for one another (John 13:35; 1 Pet 1:22).

### **Conclusion**

The greatest failure of Adventism has been its inability to mentor, guide, and provide practical theological guidance on how to journey with God. Often the cost of discipleship is counted, but the cost of non-discipleship is greater with the loss of an abundant life of peace, security, service, and transformation. Transformation must not be seen as a self-indulgent navel gazing passive exercise, nor is it another program or passing fad, but is an active enterprise that requires effort to stand in the light and promises of God, which allows him to shape his disciples to glorify God and to more effectively serve him. Shaping of our souls in one direction or another is a continual process and devotional habits to assist followers to be imbued with his presence and to hear Jesus’ voice. In an information-saturated world combined with factually based church culture, the temptation is to default to pseudo-simplicity of the extremes of legalism or cheap grace. There is a cost to discipleship; the cost is to embrace a new paradigm of living that calls people to be holy, yet live in tension with the reality that

perfection will not be realized this side of the second coming. However, the defining motive must be the honest intent to submit, worship and seek the presence of his kingdom in our lives and to serve him no matter the cost. It is fitting to close with Paul's response to this tension of holiness, works, effort, grace and the process of transformation: "I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me" (Phil 3:12 NLT).



## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Introduction**

Today, in the Western world, the Seventh-day Adventist church is in the best position ever to nurture its' members to a mature faith with the infrastructure of churches, schools, universities, the advancement of scholarship, and the increase in wealth and resources. Yet, there seems to be a sense that inside Adventism, (Tilstra, 1999, pp. 1-4) and in the wider Christian Church that there is a growing superficiality amongst Christianity characterized by incongruity between beliefs and how one lives. The causes are complex.

There is a multi-faceted dynamic inter-play of factors that has combined to impact the spirituality of Christianity and Adventism in a way that other generations have not experienced to the same intensity that has contributed to a dramatic decline in spirituality. This chapter will explore factors that include: (a) postmodernity, (b) secularism that has led to a changing worldview, (c) the dramatic rise of narcissism, (d) compartmentalization with the movement toward a highly individualized faith, and (e) Adventist's traditional approach to discipling that have concatenated to erode spirituality. Consequently, faith has become detached from everyday life with little discernible transformation. This chapter will also explore the praxis of discipleship. In order to understand the state of Adventist spirituality, spirituality must first be defined.

## **Spirituality**

Spirituality must begin with the most basic of commands to fear God, to worship and give glory to him (Rev 14: 7). God wants us to love him and to love our neighbor. Hagberg and Guilich, (2005) describe spirituality ultimately as “the way in which we live out our response to God” (p. 3); Kualampi (2010) in a similar vein, quoting James (1985), who defines spirituality as purely an inner human experience as “feelings, acts, and the experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (p. 25). However, this places too much emphasis on our response and thereby locus of control of the relationship with God remains with the individual. De Benedicto (2006) uses root metaphors to discuss spirituality of contemplation, presence, silence, and journaling, but these “metaphors” are more about disciplines to experience spirituality and therefore in of themselves do not fully explain spirituality.

According to Manners (2008) biblical spirituality is God’s desire to relate to people and therefore “remains firmly outside of ourselves” (p. 1), yet we must live with God at an internal level. Willard (2002) explains spirituality as “nothing less than an invasion of natural human reality by supernatural life from God” (p. 5). Dybdhal (2008) goes further and defines spirituality relationally as a “double longing” (p. 19). The double longing is one that is a deep intense desire for his presence and as this desire is nurtured, we discover “God’s heart longs for us” (p. 19). This understanding captures the richness of the communal relationship that grows where God immerses himself in the tangle of everyday life. This longing cannot be manufactured or willed and is thus a free gift of grace that comes from the deep love the Father has for his people (Tilstra, 1999, p.

3). Further, this double longing does not end when one has found God as supposedly happens when all is invested upon the initial act of accepting Christ at conversion. The problem with the conversion centered model is that one does not feel the need to pursue God following conversion and so Tozer (2006) peels to a deeper layer, stating “to have found God and still to pursue him is the soul’s paradox of love” (p. 15), and so begins a life-long journey with God.

True spiritual renovation begins with God through the rebirth (John 3) and growth begins in the heart where one must humble themselves, repent, consecrate, eliminate sin, serve and follow him, thereby centering their lives upon him. Barnes (1996) notes the best condition to nurture a relationship with God is to “come broken” (p. 83). It is in the brokenness that we abandon the certainty our human nature craves and therefore a seeker is then in a position to trust God. For spirituality to be real it must be “a lived experience” (Holt, 2005, p. 8). This experience will ebb and flow, start, stop, surprise, but this journey is not a quick trip to a destination, but is a life-long journey where all thoughts and actions will shape and impact spirituality for better or worse. The essence of holistic spirituality is a vitally connected relationship with Christ who lives in our hearts, where we are being conformed into the image of Christ, for his glory, “for the sake of others” (Mulholland, 1993, p. 15). To nourish the relationship we must nurture and embrace attitudes and devotional habits that create an opportunity to experience the presence of God.

However, there are significant factors in this world that impacts the church’s ability to provide an artemogenic environment for sapiential growth. In order to examine the

state of Adventist spirituality it is important to understand the cultural milieu for Discipleship.

### **Postmodernity/Modernity**

There is no question that the cultural milieu of today has profoundly impacted religiosity negatively. Paradoxically, there seems to be an increased desire for spirituality but not for the traditional Christian moralistic genre that embraces meta-narratives.

Postmodern people value integrity, authenticity, and relevance; and the kind of Christianity that will attract postmoderns is one that “emphasizes primary truths and authentic embodiment” (Webber, 1999, p. 27). In other words, proclamational truths and metanarratives must intersect in the mundaneness of everyday life. However, the current discipleship model practiced in the Seventh-day Adventist church relies on the practice of promulgation and apprehension of fundamental beliefs at the expense of vital connection to God. Sheldrake (2008, pp. 110, 138), Dybdahl (2008, pp. 13-16) and Charry (1999 pp. 30-48) identify the rise of formal theology at the expense of mystical and devotional theology. The effect of this has been a disproportionate emphasis on intellectual teaching at the expense of teaching and preparing a spiritual people. Dybdahl (2008, p.14) cited a survey conducted by the Murdoch Trust to assess the priority placed on spirituality by laity, pastors and theologians and discovered expectations varied widely. The laity rated spirituality number one with the same expectation for their Pastors. However, pastors rated spirituality only at number four and even more disturbingly, seminary professors did not rate spirituality in the top five for pastoral training. Knowledge rated as the top priority for training and therefore has come at the cost of teaching the spiritual life.

The result is an enormous gap in the minds of many Christians including Adventists between what we understand to be the goal of sanctification and what is going on in the everyday lives of Christians in what John Coe calls the “sanctification gap” (Coe, 2009, p. 5). Is there any wonder there is a hunger for spirituality and very little sapiential transformation?

### **Adventist Spirituality**

Every generation has a new set of cultural and philosophical issues to face. To assess Adventist spirituality, it is useful to examine Evangelical Christianity for both are exposed to forces that can erode spirituality. David Watson in the forward to Foster’s book (Foster, 1988, p. 1) described Christianity as “flabby,” while Rick Warren bemoans “perpetual immaturity of the members” (as cited in Andrews, 2010, p. 10). Foster observes that “superficiality is the curse of our age,” (Foster, 1988, p. 1) and has become axiomatic amongst Christianity. On the other hand, beyond the generalizations, Willard identifies the core of superficiality as “the desire and motive to do everything to preserve one’s own equilibrium” and Willard rightly observes that this colors everything one does thereby falling victim to “self-idolatry” (Willard, 2002, p. 12). This ethos is core to secularism, where the prime motivator is to “do your own thing” (Twenge, 2007, p. 24). The impact on spirituality is that moral and spiritual choices become subservient to self. Miles (1997) a sociologist, in her thesis states that Gen Xers “trust only in the self” (p. 8) and moral choices are based on relativism. It is these traits of character that have impacted Christianity to the point that there is little observable difference between the Secular and Christian mindset.

## Narcissism

It has been noted that spirituality today is centered on self and its needs and although this has been present since the time of Cain and Abel, the difference with the current generation is the intensification of youth culture and the dramatic rise of narcissism. Twenge and Campbell (2009, p. 247) thoroughly document the rise of narcissism and self-admiration to epidemic proportions. The danger is that it creates a fantasy world around themselves characterized by plastic surgery, social networking sites, consumerism, with an over focus on self-esteem where all are special. In the end this fantasy world is highly destructive when reality hits (p. 4). Baudrillard (2003), in a similar vein, coined the term “hyper-reality” (pp. 22-24) where one was unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality and so creates a reality by proxy. Consequently, this has created a highly individualistic society with the locus of control on self that blinds the ability to see the need for salvation that has impacted the local church. Thus, it should not be a surprise to observe consumer-based religion with increased individual choice with little demanded from congregants. Twenge (2003) observes that many are less inclined to “follow the rules of organized religion” (p. 34). Twenge and Campbell (2009) go further and note that it has become increasingly common for the individual to determine his or her own ideas of God and what is acceptable for one’s self, (p. 247) and so self becomes the most beloved. This explains why the plurality of expressions of spirituality is oriented to self and syncretistic (Bendicto, 2006, p. 2). This consumer-based approach to Christianity is anathema to biblical spirituality that involves a relationship between “the whole person and a holy God” (Ferguson, Wright, & Packer,

1988, p. 657) with their lives center upon God (Bendicto, 2006, p. 1) and his will rather than seeking to fulfill personal needs.

The combination of these influences has affected the moral behavior of Christians. Barna (2008) notes that while society has become more intrigued with morality, Christians have redefined how one should live and respond to moral choices. Although this may confirm what many had suspected, the level of relativism revealed in the figures in the table below is nonetheless stunning.

Table 1

*Comparison of Traditional Moral Behaviors Between Boomer Generation and Mosaics*

Traditional Behavior	Under 25	Baby Boomer Generation
Profanity	64%	19%
Alcohol Abuse	25%	9%
Pornography	33%	16%
Sex outside of Marriage	38%	4%
Acts of Retaliation	12%	5%

Clearly these behaviors are not consistent with beliefs espoused by professed Christians. Are Seventh-day Adventists any different and has superficiality impacted Adventist spirituality to the same extent?

The second Valuegenesis report (Gillespie & Donahue, 2004) analyzed 10,000 respondents in 2000 and 2001 in the North American Division to understand teenagers as

they relate to church, family, school and most importantly, their spirituality.

Valuegenesis defined faith maturity as a “vibrant life-transforming experience marked by both a deep and a personal relationship to a loving God” that is interlinked “to serving others” (p. 97). Despite the lack of qualitative data to measure faith maturity the Valuegenesis report did reveal some startling results. The survey reported that faith maturity had increased from 22% in 1991 to 45% (p. 99). Though the report did not engage the respondents as to *how* they practiced their faith, it did report that 77% saw themselves as “somewhat religious” and only 19% “very religious” (p.108). However according to the report, an important predictor of faith maturity is personal piety as measured in Valuegenesis by how often young people read the Bible and Ellen White, pray and endorse church standards. A comparison of the changes in devotional habits between Valuegenesis I in 1993 and the second report in 2004 highlights significant changes to spiritual practices:

Table 2

*The Difference in Devotional Habits Between Valuegenesis I (1993) and Valuegenesis II (2004)*

Devotional Habit	Valuegenesis I	Valuegenesis II
Prayer	54%	73%
Bible	73%	54%
Ellen White	13%	6%
Media	36%	48%



While daily prayer had increased, there was a disturbing decline in reading of the Bible and Ellen White with a modest rise in media usage. The statistics on media usage seems to be out of step with Barna's research. Barna Group (2001) discovered that young people on average interact with mass media 4-6 hours a day (p. 26) and parents are similar and also were relatively unconcerned (Barna, 2011, p.1) about the intrusion of media. The influence of the media cannot be understated, for according to Mueller (2006) media provides "maps of reality" and more disturbingly he noted that (p. 27) friends and peers had replaced the family as the main influencer and the church had not registered on the list (p. 25). Media, in all its forms, reflects secular ideals and values that dramatically impact spiritual values, beliefs and faith (Mueller, 2007, p. 82). Yet many parents and young people do not censor media.

Valuegenesis noted that 73% of young people described themselves as "somewhat religious," which could suggest that spirituality coupled with anecdotal observations that faith is increasingly compartmentalized and individualized. Clearly secular society and postmodernity has impacted the values and the practice of spirituality on Christians today and this is reflected in the low numbers regularly reading the Bible. Although the number of young people reading Ellen White is disturbingly low number at 6%, this may also be due also to how her writings have been used in addition to the impact of secularism. The impact of secularism is further reinforced by Barna's (2001) research, which evaluated the spiritual priorities in life and observed that eight out of ten believers are more likely to pursue every day dimensions of life such as education, career and financial security with faith only a "bonus or an add on dimension" (p. 39). The remaining 20% selected their faith as the first priority and the center of their lives, which

interestingly corresponds to the 19% “very religious” from the Valugenesis report cited above. There can be no question that secularism, and the pervasiveness of media has dramatically atomized the “urgency” often spoken of in the Bible and Ellen White, which was a conclusion Barna (2001) came to when he evaluated the effort Christians made in order to grow spiritually. Barna concluded with similar ratios to above that four out of five Christians wanted to grow spiritually but made little effort (p. 42). This underscores the lack of desire to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matt 6:33).

The question arises, is the compartmentalization of one’s faith merely an iteration of what has gone on in previous generations; a desire to pursue spirituality under one’s own terms, or does this run deeper? While adolescents have always had the ability to apply abstract concepts and reflective thought to different layers in their everyday life, Clark (2004) makes the startling observation that adolescents have a “unique conceptualization process for the different layers in their lives” (p. 20). What makes adolescents different to previous generations, according to Clarke (2004)), is their “lack of ability to construct bridges between one layer or another,” (p. 20). What this means is that adolescents, unlike adults, are able to live increasingly compartmentalized lives and thereby are able to easily rationalize and live with contradictions between beliefs, values and attitudes. This has enormous implications for how one lives out the spiritual life and indeed how the Church inculcates attitudes and beliefs.

Clarke’s observation helps to explain why young adults struggle with morality. It has already been noted how relativism has impacted the spirituality of Adventist young people and therefore it should be no surprise that our world is “marked by a new level of moral relativism” (Mueller, 2006, p. 66). This demonstrates all the more the importance

of discipling church members to connect with Christ to a daily experience. On this note we will now discuss briefly how the Seventh-day Adventist church has responded to discipleship in a postmodern world.

### Seventh-day Adventist Discipling

Traditionally, Adventist spirituality has relied on preaching and proclamation of “the truth” reinforced by vigorous teaching in the Sabbath School, vespers and in some traditional cultures AY programs (AY programs have not operated in Anglo Saxon churches in Australia and New Zealand since the early 1980s, but still operate in Polynesian churches). Historically, evangelism has sought to intellectually convince prospective converts by argument (Froom, 1948) at the expense of spiritual conversion. This was an issue Froom (1971) traced back to 1854 when early Adventists unwittingly emphasized the “Commandments of God” at the expense of “Faith in Jesus” and personal regeneration (pp. 89-90). There is no question that the church, since its inception, is rich in its theoretical understandings of God, salvation, prophecy and others. Whidden (2005) notes that the Adventist pioneers were “truth-driven seekers” (p. 2). However, in this context James and Ellen White became aware of the “spiritual aridity” amongst Adventists. The church still remains vulnerable to the charge that since the crisis of 1888 we have not provided Adventist Christians with a meaningful application of doctrine to the everyday struggles of life. This omission leaves congregants frustrated and spirituality dry. Today the spiritual aridity has been exacerbated by Adventism’s reliance on knowledge only. Cress (2008) admits knowledge and correct information is insufficient (p. 2) and that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is essential, but he

offers no alternative other than the traditional teaching model. This is where the Adventist church has struggled.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is driven by mission and in the drive for efficiency the church has focused on the conversion centered model. Our pursuit of doctrinal clarity is shown in our lineal model: evangelize through Bible studies, convert and baptize with the concomitant focus on extrinsic behavior defined by lifestyle and rules. Russell Burrill epitomizes the traditional Adventist approach to spirituality. Burrill (1996, p. 26) in his book— *“Radical Disciples”*—promotes the model for discipleship that is mission driven where a disciple enters into a “learning relationship with the master” with a teachable spirit in order to “know the truth” (p. 35) and then is baptized. Burrill’s key to spiritual growth and conversion lies in knowing the teachings of Jesus. Burrill is not alone in his view as James Cress, the late ministerial secretary for the General Conference, sums up the discipleship process that “involves the whole process of initial instruction (pre-baptism), welcoming new members into the community, and teaching them to observe all things (post-baptism). These practices are needed, but this approach misses the core of how to grow spiritually and therefore this is a continuation of the traditional Adventist discipleship model that fails to engage believers in a sapiential discipleship process that leads believers to Christ. Consequently, Adventism has assumed that traditional disciplines that engage believers with God are caught and therefore not taught (Dybdahl, 2008, p. 15).

The confluence of secularism, postmodernity, relativism, and the current practice of discipleship in the Adventist church, has led to many young people leaving the church when they begin their university studies. According to Barna, approximately 61%

disengage when they become young adults (Barna, 2006, p. 1). There are similar figures in Australia where approximately 70% of Adventist university students disengage (Brown, 2006, p. 1) with some estimates as high as 90% (Hopkins & Weslake, 2004, p. 8). Barna makes the insightful observation that despite effective youth ministries the level of attrition is due to a failure of “discipleship and faith formation.” The fact that up to 90% of young adults are leaving the church when they attend university is not only alarming, but demonstrates that the model of faith formation is not working.

There are signs that change is on the horizon with a growing sense that there must be a change. Maxson (1993) understands well the necessity of discipleship in the Adventist church, reminding us that our primary responsibility is to make disciples. For pastors he succinctly states “Pastoral ministry reduced to its least common denominator is spiritual formation – moving the entire life toward God” (p. 2). However, the aforementioned statistics describing the decline of devotional habits and the numbers leaving church at tertiary level suggests the church must do better to teach and model spirituality that includes devotional habits.

### **Comparison of the Spirituality of Ellen White With Selected Literature Outside of Adventism**

In recent times, there has been an explosion of books on discipleship and spiritual formation from all sectors of Christianity. All agree there is a tremendous need for sapiential transformation with the core devotional habits of Solitude, meditation, prayer, and devotional reading of the Bible to assist the transformational process. Given the broad agreement, it will be assumed these practices are core to a transformative relationship with Jesus. The Seventh-day Adventist church should have been at the

forefront to set the “trend” in this area but regrettably lags well behind. Ironically, all the information for holistic sapiential transformation is readily available in the writings of Ellen White who was well ahead of her times. However, there are some crucial emphases that Ellen White brings to bear on spiritual formation that other writers and commentators gloss over or ignore altogether and it is in these areas, with the concomitant weight she gives, that she makes her contribution to sapiential formation unique – particularly in the postmodern era. These areas concern how we approach God with humility, consecration, surrendering of our will, surrender of pride, selfishness, self-sufficiency with abandonment of our glory in order that God is glorified characterized by an air of urgency. Unfortunately, as already noted, the disturbing irony is that only 6% of Adventist young people engage her writings once a week and her lack of popularity is perhaps due to Dybdahl’s (2008 p. 17)) observation that her writings are used to arbitrate theological discussions instead of reading some of her writings devotionally.

The union with Christ was one of her most central themes and Kuhalampi’s (2010) dissertation gives a wonderful insight that the union with Christ is ontological (p. 62) by nature as opposed to a theological extrapolation or merely metaphorical. This union is made possible through justification, where “Christ’s character stands in place of your character” (White, 1892b, p. 62). The ontological nature of the relationship goes beyond forensic justification when she immediately adds “Christ changes the heart” (White, 1892b, p. 62) and so it is here that our union with Christ becomes ontological and affects every facet of one’s life. Ellen White’s reporting on the conference of Minneapolis in 1888 expressed her concern that Christ be formed within the human mind and that “there be a living connection with God” (White, 1889 p. 275). She warns that

“unless we become vitally connected with God” (White, 1898, p. 324), the effects of selfishness, narcissism and temptation cannot be overcome and so the union with Christ became central (Kuhlampi, 2010, p. 17). Her contention was that the ministers “preach the same dry theories” (White, 1889, p. 273) and in order to teach the doctrines we must have a “living connection with Jesus” (White, 1889, p. 275).

Transformation of character comes from outside through the power of the Holy Spirit who “convicts and softens the heart” (White, 1898, p. 656). The Holy Spirit “molds and fashions the character” (1893, p. 1) and “changes ideas and theories, habits and practices” (1902, p. 1). The transformative purpose of the Holy Spirit is to “bring every thought into captivity to Jesus Christ” (1911, p. 483). White (1898) states that the Holy Spirit “touches the hearts” of people (p. 308), “convicts of sin” (1911, p. 52), “subdues the soul” (1898, p. 482) “moves upon the heart” (1898, p. 605), and presents Christ as the Savior of sinful human beings that ultimately enables them also to view themselves as God intends them to. However, she concludes that it is the person of Christ, his character and ministry that have the most forceful impact, helping people to deal with “their helpless unworthiness” and to consolidate a positive self-image for which Christ provides himself as the model. It is for these reasons that White insists that a deep and intense encounter with Christ is needed (1892b, p. 91).

Ultimately, Christians are shaped into the “likeness of Christ” (White, 1900, p. 68) through the Holy Spirit instructing the heart via the scriptures (1885a, p. 333); leading to heart purification (1898, p. 104). This part of the journey is critical for White who correctly states that a person can make “outward corrections” of behavior and even appears to have a “well ordered life,” but a “selfish heart can perform generous actions

with a selfish motive” (White, 1892b, p. 58). Therefore, sapiential transformation must occur in the heart where real change can only occur through the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit, whose work will be shown through the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22, 23). White offers a simple test for whether genuine transformation is taking place with the question: “who has the heart?” (1892b, p. 58) Where do our thoughts, affections and energies lay? The core of transformation for our part is that we must choose whom we give our will to (1892b, p. 47). How one responds will determine if sapiential transformation and conformity to his/her character can occur.

### **Praxis of Discipleship**

The praxis of discipleship is conformity to his character and yet while God seeks us, our response to him is critical. Our response while grounded in obedience must spring spontaneously from service of love (White, 1900, p. 385) which is the essence of true discipleship (Anderson, 1997, p. 32) as opposed to mechanical obedience. It is our connection and conformity to Christ that changes the heart, but this can only happen in an atmosphere of humility, consecration and being teachable. In this process attitudes of pride, independence and self-sufficiency must progressively be atomized. White (1897b) states the presence of “pride and self-love” resists the Holy Spirit (p. 1).

Scazzero (2003) while concerned with the transformation of disciples believes emotional health has been ignored by most discipleship models (p. 55). He believes the chief ailment of the church is that members “are unconnected to their own emotions or those around them” (p. 37). Scazzero interprets sin and failures of disciples as a lack of insight of self when he states, “huge numbers of people are totally unaware of the dichotomy between their exterior and interior worlds” (p. 55). This hypocrisy, according



to Scazzero, is more about a lack of emotional integration, than sins against God. Self-integration de-values the nature of sin and sin, as well as the need for reconciliation with God and trans-generational issues must be secondary.

Scazzero states, “the longest journey of any person is the inward journey” and on the surface parallels Ellen White’s statement “warfare against self is the greatest battle” (1896, p. 43). However, the differences between their spirituality are profound. Scazzero’s introspection is to uncover trans-generational sins and issues for “it is impossible to help people to break free from their past apart from understanding the families in which they grew up.” The focus is on self-effort to uncover past sins in order to become whole and true to self. Consequently, emotional well-being becomes the benchmark for maturity. Consequently, attitudes of surrender, repentance, consecration, humility and a teachable spirit, that are critical and necessary traits for Ellen White’s view of sapiential transformation, are not integral to Scazzeros spirituality. It appears spirituality has been pressed through the prism of psychology of self-integration.

The accurate apprehension of the human condition is essential to the transformation of the heart. The National Study of Youth and Religion interviewed and studied 3000 Christian teenagers and concluded with the dire warning that “moral therapeutic deism” had colonized Christianity where radical transformation has been replaced with a “theology of self” and/or “self-actualization” (Mohler, 2005, p. 1). The primary concern is with being “nice,” “happy” and “non-judgmental” (Mohler, 2005, p. 1). White provides useful insight that each one possesses in himself the source of “his own happiness or wretchedness. If he will, he may rise above the low, sentimental feeling which makes up the experience of many.” Then she adds a dire warning “so long

as he is self-inflated, the Lord can do nothing for him” (1885b, p. 488). This is perhaps why radical transformation that includes humility and surrender of our will are not very popular and often brushed over. For instance, spiritual formation for Nouwen (2010) is a journey inward that is about movements from the mind to the heart in union with God through prayer and meditation, but formation lies with emotional traits of sorrow, resentment, fear, and exclusiveness. Nouwen fails to adequately define the nature of sin. He appears to be more concerned with personal freedom, which he defines discovery of ones’ “truest self” (p. 16) rather than freedom from sin. For Nouwen, repentance, consecration, surrender are concepts unimportant to the process of spiritual formation in sharp contradistinction to the nature of transformation Ellen White describes.

The spirit of self-denial and sacrifice are antithetical to “Moral Therapeutic Deism.” Yet, these are essential elements often echoed by White. For, her transformation occurs in the crucible of sacrificial self-denial through “taking up the cross” (White, 1885a, p. 522). The ‘taking up of the cross occurs in the spirit of laying down one’s life. So, what is critical is the motivational attitude rather than the deeds themselves. How does this operate in daily life? Moreland (2007) explains this as the “daily habit of living each day with a specific attitude and outlook and to live hour by hour for God’s Kingdom” (p. 146). Standing in God’s light with the right attitude of dependency upon God will allow the transformative experience. White, speaking in the context of mutual dependency with God explained the dangers of a wrong attitude stating, “if we have a spirit of self-sufficiency and independence we shall be exposed to the wiles of Satan” (1885a, p. 66). Although Moreland (2007) rightly states that there is “healthy individualism” he penetrates deeper when he adds “self-contained individual

who defines his/her own life goals, values and interests is empty, narcissistic, (p. 142) and therefore an empty receptacle.” The consequences of an independent and self-sufficient spirit will resist the voice of the Holy Spirit and “stifle conviction” (White, 1897a, p. 1) to sin. Other traits of “pride, “self” and “self-importance” must die (1885b, p. 479); self-glorification, ambitions are traits that are antithetical to an “eye single to his glory” (1892b, p. 423). Barnes (1996) observes that human nature “desires a little bit of glory” (p. 38), and therefore all must abandon our hopes of glory.

White offers clarity to how the nature of sin has affected human nature. She describes sin not only as actions, but also attitudes of pride, covetousness (White, 1892b, p. 30), selfishness, self-sufficiency and complacency. These attitudes combine to destroy the spiritual life (White, 1885b, p. 538). They stand in contrast to the spirit of unselfish service. White highlights the thoroughness of transformation that is necessary in juxtaposition to behavioral modification when she states “when the light from Christ shines into our souls we shall see how impure we are; we shall discern the selfishness of motive, the enmity against God, which has defiled every act of life” (1892b, pp. 28-29). The dire warning is given to those who lack humility and under-estimate “the exceeding sinfulness of sin” (1892b, p. 31). She warns any sin “persistently cherished, will eventually neutralize all power of the Gospel (1892b, p. 34). Yet there is still a deeper layer to the motives that beset all. At the core of these governing traits is what White calls the “force of the will” (1892b, p. 47) that governs every action. A person cannot change their heart, but a person has the power of choice and can choose to serve God and give him their will. As people give God their will this will bring their nature and thoughts into harmony with God (1892b, p. 47). When God becomes the center rather

than self, sapiential transformation occurs when the whole heart and the will are yielded to God. However, it is worth remembering that the greatest battle is “warfare against self” (1892b, p. 43).

Adventism has always prided itself that it has the truth, but this has arisen in a modernistic worldview where rationalism dominates. This rationalistic worldview has impacted the church in which some ministers have only presented doctrines. Froom (1948) addressing this, appealed to ministers that if they only presented doctrines and facts they were “failing to perform the main part of his mission.” Froom rightly stated the goal is to lead adherents to “experience spiritual regeneration” (1948). It appears little has changed since Froom wrote these articles, for Dybdahl laments the consequences of this worldview because it has given rise to a closed system defined by human activity apart from God. The unintended influence of this worldview on Adventists are that many have become what Dybdahl calls “closet deists” (2008, p. 105). An intellectual religion that downplays God’s activity in everyday life was never a part of the spirituality of believers. White warns that “faith that is unto salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to truth” (White, 1898, p. 347). For White the Gospel is, the “power of truth to transform heart and character” (as cited in Nichol, 1957, p.1117). She is concerned about union with Christ, where his character merges with ours that is revealed in attitudes, words and actions. However, some modern authors are more concerned with the process of the journey that swings the pendulum toward the individuals’ wellbeing than on a mutual relationship. For instance, Mulholland (2005) emphasizes the journey whose focus is more on the inner dynamics of faith journey with the application of Myers-Briggs Type inventory (p. 53) rather than the nature of Christ’s character in us. Hagburg (2005)

explores the journey formulaically through the stages of faith, but fails to engage in any discussion with the disposition necessary to unite with Christ and seems more concerned with normalizing one's journey in different stages as well as one's psychological wellbeing. Humility, sin, consecration and confession are attitudes that are downplayed or not mentioned. It is these traits that are necessary if the disciplines are to assist one to experience spirituality, but these traits have become unintelligible to the modern secular mind.

Essential to leading a holy life is surrender. Epperly and Epperly (2009) view life-transforming discipleship as grounded in "vision, promise, and practice" (p. 25). The focus on developing an awareness of God's presence through listening to God, and practicing the presence of God through disciplines. Though they are concerned with sapiential transformation there is no mention of why we need God, nor sin, repentance, humility or surrendering of our will as the gateways and foundation to worship of God and disciplines. White is more holistic. She is able to peel to the core of the human need and with the urgency needed, she pleads for Christians to surrender their will and to *choose to serve him*" (White, 1892b, p. 47). Only then will God work in us "to do according to his good pleasure." Self-sufficiency and pride are traits that prevent the surrender of our will. White gives the stark warning that if one seeks God with a spirit of self-sufficiency and pride, the union with Christ will fail. What sets White apart from other Christian writers are her balanced insights into human nature and the nature of sin and salvation.

In White's writings, she often highlighted the urgency of salvation, transformation, putting away of sin. However, the epistemology of the postmodern

worldview has further distorted and fragmented biblical truth by truncating any sapiential value and ameliorating any urgency. A person's worldview is the unconscious framework that deeply affects values and outlook and so even if truth is accepted as truth, it is confined to facts and ideas and consequently there seems to be little urgency and a malaise when it comes to the practice of Christianity, which has degenerated to knowing about God. Charry (1997) highlights this danger, "knowing the truth no longer implies loving it, wanting it, being transformed by it because the truth no longer brings the knower to God," (p. 236). White expresses a similar thought; "Many accept an intellectual religion, a form of godliness, when the heart is not cleansed" (1892b, p. 35). Thus, in everyday life, divine activity is questioned and consequently the validity of prayer and other disciplines are questioned. Hence the urgency to reform, commune and to be vitally connected to Christ because "all through the word of God there is manifest the spirit of urgency, of imploring men and women to come to Christ" and urges all "to look unto Jesus" (1892a, p. 506).

The fact that many Adventists have embraced an intellectual religion with little urgency to reform character results in being "closet deists" (Dybdahl, 2008, p.104). While God as creator is acknowledged, the danger is that he rarely intervenes in the daily lives of Christians and if that is the case the traditional disciplines of Bible study, meditation and prayer are of little value. The antidote is being "vitally connected to God," and this begins with a repentant heart.

### Repentance

Bock states that the most important element we bring to our Christian experience is our "open and receptive heart" (Bock, 2008, p. 114). However, he fails to mention the

traits necessary for a receptive heart. For White, repentance is the first step in “true heart religion” we must first “individually humble our souls” and when we have done this “the Lord will manifest to us his salvation” (1890, p. 590).

Repentance must be made with the right attitude, one of “godly sorrow” in response to divine grace that leads to confession, forsaking sin (White, 1892b, p. 39) and putting away without “deception” and/or “hypocrisy.” The spirit of self-justification is “not inspired by the divine Spirit” and therefore is not authentic repentance (1892b, p. 40). Contra to self-sufficiency our sufficiency is in Christ and as the relationship grows “our repentance will deepen” (1911, p. 561). Paradoxically, the closer to God the greater sense one has of their sin. In vision, Isaiah was permitted to experience the majesty of God where angels sang, “holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts and Isaiah sensed “his own inward defilement” (1892a, p. 22). Juxtaposed to the purity of God Isaiah’s conviction of sin was genuine and thus removed. White (1898) captures the seriousness of sin:

The proud heart strives to earn salvation; but both our title to heaven and our fitness for it are found in the righteousness of Christ. The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. (p. 300)

To nurture union with Christ one must be intentional about spending time in communion with the Creator. An intentional devotional life can seem self-indulgent for Charry observes, “the intentional devotional life can be mistakenly thought of as a leisurely life that stands aloof from the great “rat race” of postindustrial society in the West” (1997, p. 240). This is not the case for being intentional about the time spent with God is critical to maintaining the union with Christ. White counseled the ministers who struggled to spend time with God, “If you would have the rich treasures of heaven, you must have secret communion with God. Unless you do this, your soul will be as destitute

of the Holy Spirit as were the hills of Gilboa of dew and rain” (1892a, p. 272). She then follows this with a stark warning, particularly for ministers; “when you hurry from one thing to another, when you have so much to do that you cannot take time to talk with God, how can you expect power in your work” (1892a, p. 272). This advice given over one hundred years ago is as relevant today as it was in her time.

### **Goal of Sapiential Transformation**

What is the goal of sapiential transformation? If we are unable to conquer sin, and if we are clothed in the garments of heaven what is the end result of transformation? This has different outcomes for some authors. For Nouwen (2010) it is “to be set free by the Spirit of God (p. xxix). According to Epperly and Epperly (2009), it is to be “attentive to God’s presence.” For Hapberg, (2005) the goal is to “live out our response to God” (p. 3). While King (2006) places emphasis upon the disciplines as they “enable the revelation of God’s divine Spirit.” These are all important elements for transformation, but the essence of spirituality for Ellen White was not faithfulness to fundamental beliefs but union with Christ that must be understood in relational terms.

The overcoming of sin is an important theme for Ellen White. Sanctification, Justification, and righteousness by faith are not expressed so much in theological terms but for her they are experiential terms and thereby ontological in nature (Kualampi p. 63). Forgiveness was not merely a judicial act, but also “reclaiming from sin” (White, 1896, 114), where Christians are clothed with the spotless robe of righteousness “woven in the loom of heaven” (1900, p. 311) and in this sense are perfect before God.

The Christian life will bear fruit (Gal 5:23) “As you receive the Spirit of Christ the Spirit of unselfish love and labor for others you will grow and bring forth fruit reflect



the likeness of Christ in all that is pure and noble” (White, 1900, p. 6). Barnes (1996) expresses the ultimate goal of transformation more colloquially “giving love away is the point” (p. 52). Whites better expresses the ultimate goal of transformation, “when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within, when the sunshine of heaven fills the heart and is revealed in the countenance” (1900, p. 384). Notice she uses the word “impulse” where actions spring forth naturally and spontaneously, which can only come through the union with Christ, for which Christ invites all to inspect the fruit of transformation when he states, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another” (John 13:35). This is the kernel of the fruit of sapiential transformation. This is in sharp contrast to behavior modification which Willard (1988) aptly describes as “effort at the moment of action alone to accomplish what we want and completely ignores the need for character change” (p. 6). A Christian life that is not vitally connected with Christ will only be an intellectual religion and boundary markers or ‘standards’ will define. Religion will be characterized by formalism legalism, moralism, religious sentimentalism or pharisaic hypocrisy.

### **Conclusion**

Spirituality at its core is a vitally connected relationship to God where the heart of God desires to connect and transform the human heart to reflect his character with integrity for the sake of others and for his glory. However, the confluence of secularism, postmodernity, relativism and self-idolatry has reshaped the face of spirituality where consumerism has influenced the church and faith that has become highly individualized and compartmentalized. Christianity as a result has become increasingly superficial with declining morality that has resulted in large numbers leaving the Christian church. The

Seventh-day Adventist church has suffered similar rates of attrition. There is universal agreement of the need for sapiential transformation. Yet despite the dramatic rise in the publication of books on discipleship, White has the best and most balanced approach to transformation. All agree there needs to be disciplines to experience transformation. White places the right urgency and weight on attitudes necessary to respond to God's gift of grace, humility, pride, self-sufficiency, a teachable spirit, consecration and repentance in a way that most other authors fail to do and therefore transformation becomes ontological. The challenge is twofold. First, the Seventh-day Adventist church needs to move beyond the conversion centered model that assumes the devotional habits will be caught, to a process that teaches and models adherents *how* to become "vitaly connected" with God. Second the church must assist followers in re-engaging with the writings of Ellen White devotionally.

## CHAPTER 4

### DEVELOPMENT OF PROCESS AND NARRATIVE OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

#### **Introduction**

Glenorchy is suffering numerically and the congregants know that to reverse this trend there needs to be a spiritual revival. However, there is little consensus on how this should happen. For many, the spirituality of the members is largely based on knowledge about God with little concept of how spirituality interacts with daily life. In the Natural Church Development Survey the church scored extremely lowly in the areas of passionate spirituality and loving relationships. Thus, there is a profound need for the members to learn how to engage spiritually with God on a daily basis through a discipleship process, and a desperate need to foster loving relationships in the church. To address passionate spirituality and loving relationships there will be three parts to the strategy. First a new vision for the church will be implemented. Second, a Church Camp will be developed that will deliver concentrations on spirituality. Third, following the camp, small groups will convene for 12 weeks. Small groups will be the engine to build authentic community and loving relationships. This is a process that Glenorchy will embark on from below zero, as small groups and community are not only its weakest link, but small groups run counter-cultural to the dynamics of Glenorchy church, and so it is important to see where Glenorchy has journeyed from and how it has ended up in its current situation that has necessitated the intervention.

## **A Brief History and Spiritual Practices of the Glenorchy and its Members**

When the Glenorchy church opened in 1968, it had a worshipping congregation of approximately 200 where it remained until the late 1970s and early 1980s when the Glenorchy church numbers swelled to nearly 350 members. However, a confluence of circumstances caused by the economic downturn led to the closure of the Sanitarium retail arm in 1988 and the closure of the Sanitarium factory in the early 1990s. The result was a significant transfer of members to mainland Australia. Combined with this were apostasies and the worship wars of the mid 1990s that all concentrated to bring about a dramatic change of fortunes that saw the worshipping congregation fall from 350 to approximately 65 today.

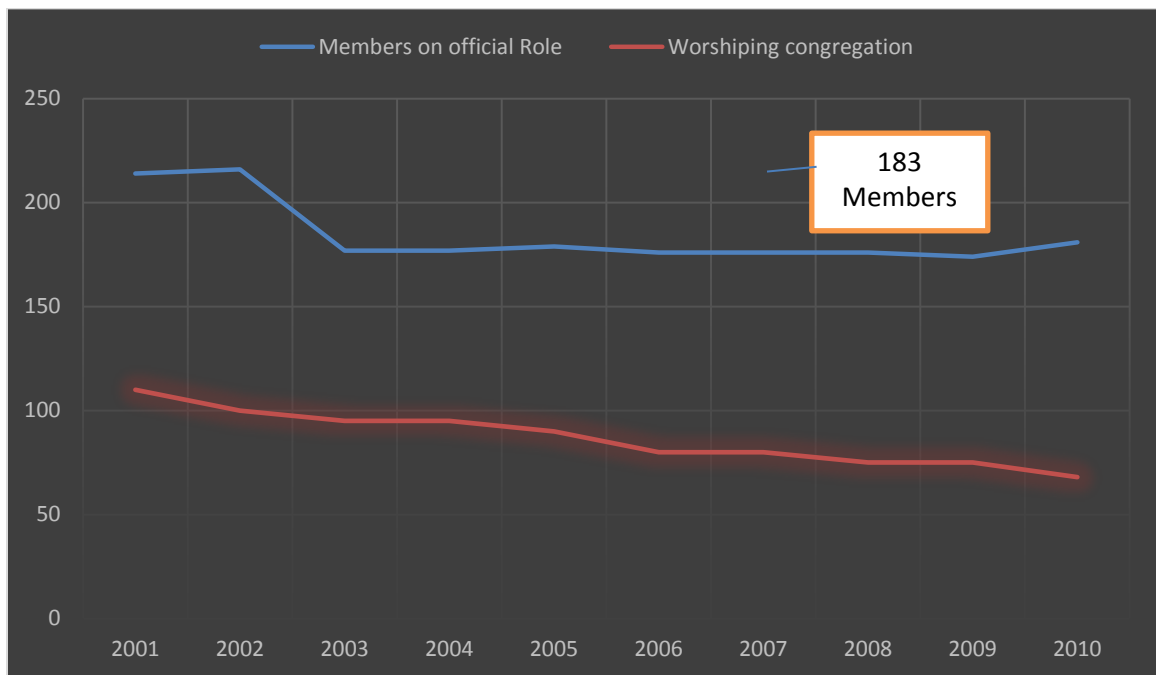
In the mid to late 1990s in an effort to reverse Glenorchy's fortunes and stem the flow of young people leaving the church, it was decided to institute a contemporary church service to run alongside the traditional service. The effect of this was twofold. First, it polarized some members and ignited the unsolvable debate over music. The second effect was even more catastrophic—whereby the energy required to run two services drained the church's energy. No doubt this was the main reason why the church did not have any major outreach during the 1990s. Further, this pitted younger members against older members and as postmoderns came of age and with the concomitant flow of increasing secularism, this exacerbated the worship debate and widened the gap between the older and younger members. Though the anger has long subsided the events are remembered well. Today, the critical mass of the church is such that most of its energy is consumed to keep the church open and running with little energy to reach into the community.

### Internal Statistics

The membership roll has shown a moderate decline over the last ten years from 213 members to 183 as of June 2011. On paper, a church roll of 183 members indicates a substantial size church by Tasmanian standards; however, the size of the worshipping congregation tells a different story. Although the size of the worshipping congregation is anecdotal, it was estimated in 2001 that there were approximately 110 people of varying ages; that has steadily declined over the last 10 years and dipped even further in the last 12 months to an average worshipping congregation of just 65 people as illustrated in Table 3. While numbers are not the best barometer for determining the health of a congregation, it does however demonstrate that the Glenorchy church is having difficulty in maintaining the worshipping congregation, let alone penetrate into the local community.

Table 3

*Membership Data: Official Membership Roll Measured Against the Worshipping Congregation*

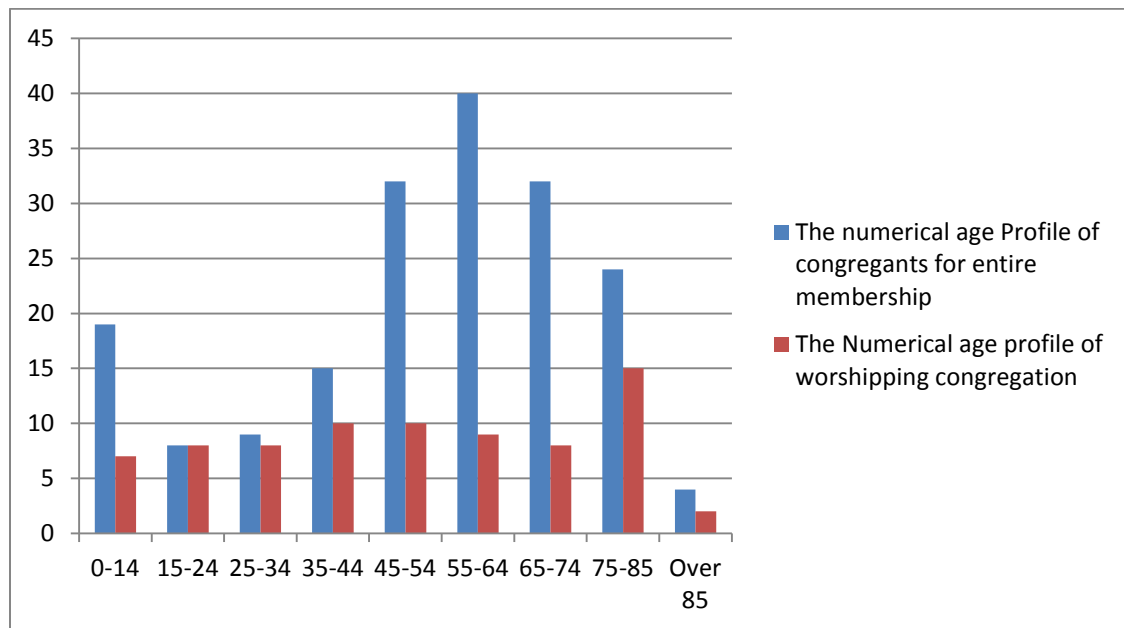


A further breakdown of the membership data into age brackets reveals there are significantly larger numbers on the roll in the 45-74 age brackets who no longer attend who have either moved to other districts without transferring their membership, or for the majority, still reside in Hobart but choose not to attend for various reasons. On the positive side, the age distribution for the worshipping congregation is relatively even across the various age groups which at least provides a base from which to build on even though the 75-85 age bracket has the most members in this bracket by at least 50%. It is

noteworthy to mention this age bracket has by far the lowest apostasy rate and indeed the highest percentile of tithe returned to the church.

Table 4

*Age profile of the Membership Roll Compared to the Worshipping Congregation.*



Glenorchy is an aging congregation with 30% of the congregation receiving the Aged Pension, a factor which has impacted leadership in the church and therefore it is not surprising that the ubiquitous 80/20 Pareto principle law of the vital few is applicable to Glenorchy. There are only 14 members who look after the 17 key leadership positions with an additional 12 positions on top of this. Amongst the retirees, there is a general reluctance to take up leadership positions feeling they are past the age where they can

make a constructive contribution. When a worshipper encounters God, service is the fruit (Isa 6:1-6; Matt 4:10). Therefore, as there is a significant gap between the few who serve compared to the majority who feel compelled to attend from a sense of duty, this reflects the general malaise and lethargy that has gripped Glenorchy. On the positive side the majority of the young people 64% (11 out of 17 from 14-34 age brackets) hold church office with a genuine desire to be involved in church life.

### Spiritual Practices and Characteristics of the Glenorchy Seventh-day Adventist Church

The regular ministries of the church include Sabbath School that starts at 9:30am with only 20 members attending. The Sabbath School lesson is enjoyed by most of the older more established members, but the traditional style of Sabbath School is not appreciated by the younger generations. The youth Sabbath School has only an average of six attending, yet Primary and Junior Sabbath shows more promise with approximately 12 regular attendees that may swell to 18 from time to time. Church follows Sabbath School at the regular time of 11:00am. There are no afternoon meetings with the exception of visiting dignitaries, nor are there mid-week prayer meetings. The result is a lack of teaching opportunities

Outside of the church service the church has the occasional socials; the Youth assist with running the Hobart Pathfinder club and another family runs monthly experiential programs for children called AWE (Acting With Empathy). Additionally, there are three small Bible study groups that operate on an ad hoc basis.



## Summary

Currently the church has no direction and is in maintenance mode although truth, knowledge, and Bible study are highly valued. There is a growing sense in Glenorchy that the church needs a revival, but the revival some desire is reiteration of truths already articulated. On paper, it would seem Glenorchy's future prospects appear grim, but it is not about numbers nor is it about doing the task of ministry, it is about the qualitative experience of the members, individually and corporately, with God that is the best barometer. In other words, it is more about "being" rather than doing.

Apart from numbers, the greatest challenge is simply the lack of time and the pressures of everyday life that weigh heavily upon the members that ultimately truncate their ability to give more time to the church which is a corollary of the compartmentalization of faith. These factors have simultaneously interacted with varying degrees of intensity to create spiritual dissonance resulting in a disconnect between the theory of the truth, and the practice of the Christian faith in everyday life which directly impacts upon the health barometer of the church. This disconnect is perpetuated by the conversion centered response that leaves many with the unspoken idea of passivity or the gnostic belief of mere ascent to truth as sufficient. These false assumptions effectively leave some to embrace a deistic worldview that leaves no room for God in the messiness of everyday life. Thus, their response to the Gospel tends to be obligatory with a feeling of being compelled.

## **Development of Strategy and Methodology of Biblical Spirituality**

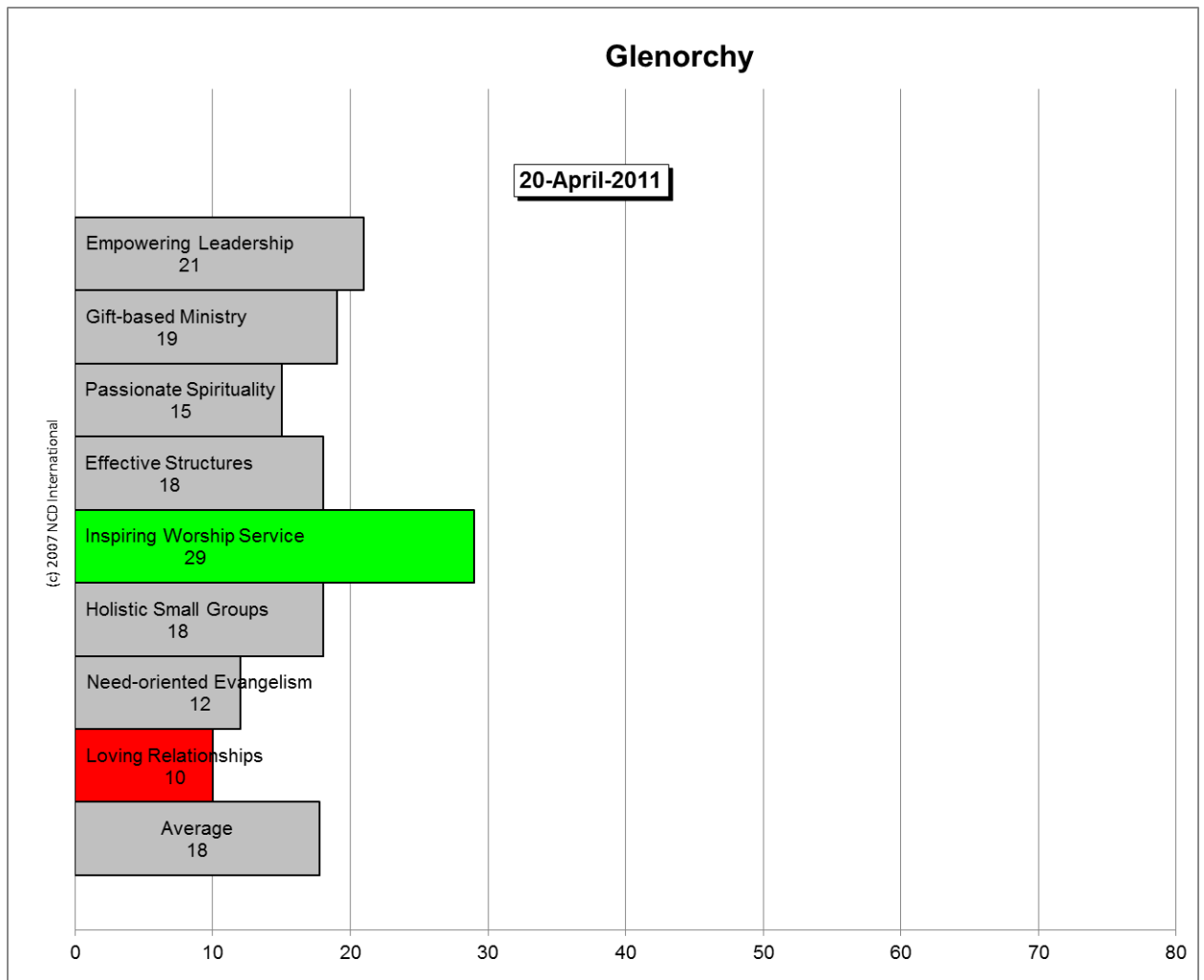
Upon arrival at Glenorchy in February 2011, to my knowledge there had been no strategic plan in place at all, and consequently the church has drifted and become

directionless. To gauge a snapshot of the health of the church and where it was situated, it was agreed in April 2011 to conduct a Natural Church Development (NCD) survey and to compare results from the 2006 NCD survey. The results were startling.

A comparison from the last NCD survey in 2006 saw an average drop of 11 points across all the eight critical factors. In the latest survey, inspiring worships scored the highest with a factor of 29, and loving relationships languished with a score of 10. NCD states that 70% of churches score between 35 and 65 and the standardization formula sets the “average” at 50. Although less than 50 is not a failure, the NCD considers a quality characteristic score of 65 to be healthy. This benchmark demonstrates how poorly Glenorchy performs across all eight factors and particularly in the area of loving relationships. Table 5 summarizes the NCD scores.

Table 5

*NCD Scores for Glenorchy Church*



NCD utilizes the Radical Quality Balance Index (RQBI) as a quotient to measure the absolute quality level of a church that summarizes all of the church profile. NCD suggests that a church with a RQBI score of 50 represents sustainable health and growth. However, Glenorchy's measurement was a mere six.

The largest drop in its profile between 2006 and 2011 was that of "loving relationships" from a factor of 30 to just 10. Of the 10 questions that scored the lowest,

nine of them concerned relationships that surrounded trust, finding friends, lack of joy, unable to talk about spiritual concerns, lack of support and lack of small groups. Clearly the building up of relationships is the greatest need in the church. According to the survey, trust is low, the ability to share spiritual and personal issues were also amongst the lowest scores along with the sense that leaders in ministry are not supporting all factors that are essential to community. The lack of community is exacerbated by the tendency for members to congregate amongst themselves and therefore it is difficult for new members to integrate. Distrust of other members is openly expressed. If the Glenorchy church is to grow spiritually and numerically, it must build community and to be a blessing to the community it will need to address these issues urgently.

The strength of the congregation, according to the survey, were “inspiring worship services,” and this is reflected in church attendance compared to Sabbath School where only about 20 people attend. Largely, the energy of the church revolves around the church service with little interaction outside of the Church service.

The NCD results were shared with the elders, Church Board and then the church at large. The church generally was not surprised at the results but the church was caught in the dilemma between the need to address the challenges, while content to leave others to do the heavy lifting. This brings to sharp focus that while all agree the church needs to build loving relationships and although they see themselves as caring but to “walk across the room” to greet someone is a task some would rather leave to others. This highlights that some have little or no insight into why there is a lack of loving relationships and if they had in anyway contributed to this. To illustrate this, an afternoon meeting with the church was organized to discuss strategies to build bridges with each other and outside of

their groups to encourage bridge building. One member verbally expressed the prevailing modus operandi to reaching to those stating, “I am happy to just talk to my friends.” Unfortunately, this myopic response is indicative of the general malaise that hovers over the Glenorchy church.

In view of these factors, to build community there needs to be a new vision for the church. Additionally, the church needs a discipleship process to connect them to God through their everyday experiences that goes beyond mere ascent to a set of doctrines.

### **The Process of Implementing Discipleship Process Based on *Steps to Christ***

The implementation of a discipleship process based on Steps to Christ focused on tilling of the soil through preaching, then formulating a vision statement, conducting a Church Camp for Glenorchy, followed by 12 small group meetings. The results of this strategy were evaluated through an interview process.

The church needed a new vision and a new strategy to be revived. At elders’ meetings, the need for a new vision was discussed regularly. As an outcome of the meetings the elders agreed to embrace the vision “To Be, To Experience, To Grow Thriving Followers of Jesus.” For this to become a reality four components must be present: (a) Lordship; (b) Presence; (c) Gospel; (d) Vision. If one of these components is missing, this will truncate the church’s ability to grow thriving followers of Jesus. It was agreed that this vision statement would inform preaching and ministry. This vision was adopted at a church business meeting and so a large 10 x 5 five-foot banner was commissioned to be hung in the church.

From the beginning of 2012, the idea of a church camp was canvassed with the members, elders, and at monthly business meetings. The camp was formally approved on May 7, 2012 to be held at the Spring Beach Youth and Convention Centre (approximately 70 kilometers from Hobart) from Friday, August 3 and conclude Sunday, August 5. After considerable discussion, it was agreed to close the church that weekend to encourage as many to come as possible. There was mixed reaction to the closing of the church, as there are a number of older traditional people who wanted this conducted from the church pulpit on a regular Sabbath. However, the non-neutral environment of a camp is critical to build relationships and sharing times that a regular church service is unable to reproduce. Given that loving relationships are extremely low; this makes the process of the camp more critical. Further, the process engendered in the camp will lay an important foundation for the small groups. Following the camp, small groups began immediately the following Wednesday night 7:30 p.m., on August 8.

There were several reasons why *Steps to Christ* was used. *Steps to Christ* will help to mitigate any misconceptions from “new teachings” of discipleship from institutions and misperceptions of spiritual formation. Unfortunately, the term “spiritual formation” has acquired unwanted baggage with alleged association with mysticism; centered and apophatic prayer, and misconceptions of meditation and so it was felt that *STC* will assuage any criticism that the discipleship process is based on false teachings, or teachings from outside forces and organizations. Second, *Steps to Christ* contains all the necessary steps and information to walk with God. The fact that *STC* is very familiar to the church members is a disadvantage, as much of the information the church members already know. However, it has been stressed to the congregants on a number of

occasions from the pulpit and Church business meetings, that it is the repository of many profound truths that need to be rediscovered and must be apprehended in order to have a vibrant functional interactive relationship with God. It is hoped that the simplicity and profundity will challenge members' preconceptions on what it means to live for Christ. It is the opinion of the writer that *Steps to Christ* has the best balance and curriculum for discipleship. Further, some discipleship curricular does not place enough emphasis upon repentance and consecration that are essential pathways for discipleship.

### **Small Groups**

A healthy church is one where all members grow, exhort, encourage, witness and serve God to the best of their abilities and gifts. When congregants are spiritually healthy they intrinsically serve as God intends and consequently, evangelism organically arises from within. The focus upon the spiritual health of a church is for Seventh-day Adventists a profound paradigm shift from programs and events to a focus on spiritual health, and from task orientated focus to the indwelling of Christ in each believer. Although all Adventists should be interested in spiritual health, spiritual health cannot be inculcated through evangelistic programs or by knowledge alone and Hawker and Parkins (2011) found in their survey that church activity does not drive spiritual growth (pp. 18-19). Fostering spiritual health comes in part from knowledge, but small groups has the potential to foster an environment that can become artegenic. This kind of environment can foster the intrinsic empowerment of the Holy Spirit that becomes like a mid-wife that births personal responsibility for spiritual growth, service, and witnessing that builds community. It is here that theology becomes sapiential where theology connects to the messiness of everyday life. So, to loving relationships cannot be programmed but it is

essential to build an environment to ensure small groups are relationship-centric and small groups are the best medium to accomplish this.

The small group model that I utilized in this phase is a ministry model developed by Dr. Allan Walshe (Class lectures, 2012), Chair of the Discipleship and Religious Education Department at Andrews University. The conceptual framework applied is presented with my comments but is the intellectual property of Dr. Allan Walshe and is used and applied in this study with his permission though he retains all rights thereto.

The Small groups will be designed to build relationships and spiritual health by teaching devotional habits that become windows into the presence of God. To inculcate devotional practices, the andragogy teaching method will be utilized rather than didactic learning. Didactic learning relies too much on content, but in a post-modern world adult learning occurs best utilizing the anagogical teaching method that is experientially based. Experientially based teaching is egalitarian in that it equalizes all, where the leader becomes the facilitator who creates environments of trust, shared learning experiences that in turn enrich relationships.

### Group Process

The key to the andragogy method is process. It is the process, rather than content per se that is the essential key to learning. While there needs to be content, the primary learning mode is for the facilitator to first model process that notices concepts or “nudges” from the text that arise from personal and private reflection and this then becomes the springboard for discussion and sharing. This process seeks to understand how the text intersects with their everyday life. Process seeks to create shared experiences that build relationships horizontally and vertically. Critical to the dynamics



of the group is to bring experiences into the room, and into the lives and hearts of the participants as opposed to talking about concepts and events that are “outside the room” such as third party experiences or the recitation of clichés. Therefore, the key is to focus sharing on what is happening in their walk with God and how the text relates to their lives. The benefit is that this process seeks to understand the experiences that intersect with their lives, that touch their hearts in ways that is not task oriented, and through the sharing of personal experiences this builds mutuality and community. For optimum growth of the group, process is garnered through authenticity, openness, confidentiality, and honesty. Too often Adventists rely on the superficiality of masks. Authentic openness and sharing is the most powerful way for a group to grow spiritually. To facilitate the process in the group the right questions are as important as the answers. The utilization of open reflective questions rather than informational and closed questions will assist the group to wrestle with issues of faith.

### Closed Group

After the third week the small group will become a closed group. The first three weeks will allow opportunity to decide whether they wish to commit and join the group for 12 weeks. Although closed groups may run counter-intuitive in a church that is seeking to build community and spiritual growth or to evangelize others, this is not a program and people need the safety and the consistency of the closed group that will create optimum growth. The transience of people joining late who have not been on the journey or leaving early will impede sharing and erode trust and consequently the group will regress to superficiality. Closed groups will maximize the potential of shared experiences that will develop trust and grow relationship horizontally and vertically.

### Small Group Structure

The length of the meeting will be 90 minutes, starting at 7:30 p.m. and finishing at 9:00 p.m. The meeting will begin with prayer and then move to “transitional learning.” Transitional learning is facilitated by “history giving” questions that allow members to share information about themselves, which helps members to get to know each other. The purpose of this segment is to transition the groups from what has happened through the day to what is happening in the room. The success of this segment will be gauged on how well the members willingly share. This is essential to process, as sharing builds trust and prepares them for sharing in “stepping into scripture,” which is a personal growth section that looks at the devotional habit of reflective reading. The second part of the session is “stepping into *Steps to Christ*.” To assuage perceptions of relying on Ellen White and the desire to connect participants to scripture, a scripture reading connected to the chapter will be given each week. Each week they are to read a chapter of *STC* and share what segments they found intriguing and to share the reasons why they found that part of the chapter significant, and how that has impacted them.

### Reflective Reading

Reflective reading is a reflective process through the presence of the Holy Spirit, who interacts with the believer through scripture where one “notices” aspects in scripture that becomes significant to participants where they sense God is touching their lives or “nudging them.” The richness of this process is that reflection for each member will invariably be different to what other participants notice, and thereby creating a rich environment for shared individual experiences. This is quite different from informational reading that seeks common understanding on pericopes and doctrinal teaching. The aim

here is not to enrich doctrinal understanding, but to assist participants to walk with God throughout the day and to learn to be aware of his presence and to create shared spiritual experiences. Members are not used to sharing personal spiritual experiences so this will be new to them. Normal practice for reflective reading has been to use approximately three verses with the emphasis to allow for a few passages to wash over the reader. For the small groups, some passages will be longer to allow them more opportunity to find verses in the scripture that resonates with them. Reflecting on scripture will be completely new to them and so three verses may cause premature frustration.

### *Steps To Christ*

*Steps to Christ* was used as the basis for discipleship process as it is small, simple yet, profoundly practical for a day-to-day walk with God. Each segment has an important teaching component for the discipleship process. As mentioned, each participant will read a chapter a week and on the final week will read the last two chapters.

### **God's Love for Man**

Unbeknown to many worshippers at Glenorchy, is that God has “bound our hearts by unnumbered tokens in heaven and in earth has sought to reveal himself to us” (White, 1892, p. 10). The purpose of the first lesson is to discover the invitation to walk with God on a journey. Many small group participants have been Adventist for years. However, though they know a lot of facts about God and have been told that God loves them, they need to *experience* the love of Christ. John 14:8-9 highlights how the Father has manifested himself through Jesus and when we commune with the Father he is able to heal and meet all our needs. Phillip had been with Jesus for over three years and still

did not know the Father. The focus here will be the necessity for all followers to learn to know and experience the absolute love of God. The mechanics of reflection on scripture will be outlined and modeled.

### **The Sinners Need of Christ**

It is not enough to perceive and understand truth, nor is it enough to conform to spoken and unspoken boundary markers that become the cultural norms to define orthodoxy. It is Christ alone through the Holy Spirit that regenerates the heart, and so the second chapter highlights that mere assent to truth is not enough, but all must be regenerated through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. All disciples need to understand their sense of lostness and how lost all are without Christ's sacrifice. The story of Nicodemus meeting Jesus at night for reflective reading compliments this chapter (John 3:3-9). It reminds participants that even Nicodemus, a learned Pharisee, had to be born from above and though as rudimentary as this teaching is, it is often assumed Adventists fully apprehend what it means to be "born again."

### **Repentance**

For transformation and restoration of God's image, Repentance is one of the primary, but often neglected, pathways to God. Repentance in *STC* is sorrow and the renunciation of sin and the sinful life. Genuine repentance must be cognizant of the seriousness of sin. Many in Glenorchy live compartmentalized lives, and repentance breaks compartments down. Confession of individual sins is important, but one can be blind to such things as hatred toward others. The difference between repentance and confession is that repentance deals primarily with our allegiance to God and the direction

of our lives. Clearly the two are inextricably related for sin that is indulged in, will “strengthen the soul’s aversion to God” (White, 1892, p. 34). The story of David’s fall and confession in Psalm 51:1-10 seemed like the ideal scripture to reflect on. The key element to the penitent is: “Create in me a pure heart of God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Repentance of individual sins in the group will not be encouraged.

## **Confession**

Repentance and confession is a critical pathway to worship and a relationship with God and with the growing compartmentalization of faith, confession no longer operates in all facets of the believer. Confession is the seeking of forgiveness of sins, which must be specific and expressed with an attitude of humility that “must be heartfelt” (White, 1892, p. 38), genuine, and come from the depth of the soul. The fruit of genuine confession is reformation of the heart and character. Living a consistent life requires insight into secret sins, thoughts, motives, actions, and even our blind spots and so confession is at the core of the process to being transformed into a mature Christian. Insight through the Holy Spirit into to the secret layers of motives, desires, and the tendency to minimize and excuse, are essential to confession for Jeremiah who warns that the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jer 17:9), and therefore all will fall. The passage for reflection will be 1 John 1:5-2:3, which promises to all his disciples that they do not plan to sin but it is inevitable and therefore all have an Advocate with the Father.

## **Consecration**

Consecration is critical for all followers to ensure that their core motivation is to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matt 6:33), but standing in the way is self and the pursuit of one’s own desires. The greatest battle all have to fight, White (1892) says, is against self (p. 43). Consecration is the struggle all endure in order to surrender their will so that the heart can be transformed. Many go through the motions of performing the Christian duty as what God requires of them, but White warns that a religion based on their own efforts is worth nothing. It is only when Christ dwells in the heart with an attitude of consecration, repentance and confession will the soul be transformed by his love and will experience the joy of communion with him (White, 1892, pp. 44-45). Ephesians 2:1-10 was chosen to highlight the difference between the old life and the new life in Christ. The goal here is to wrestle with the tension between seeking God’s kingdom and our own desires.

## **Faith and Acceptance**

Christ promises acceptance and forgiveness if we confess our sins and consecrate ourselves to serve God, then God in turn promises to make all whole (White, 1892, p. 51). Too often people do not *feel* saved or that God could not possibly love them, but *STC* emphasizes that our salvific relationship is not based on how one feels, but on God’s absolute unmovable promise. The story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) emphasizes the value he places on the lost and how God greets those who return to him. The key question for reflection will be “What aspect of the character intersects with your life?” It is hoped that here the participants will experience grace anew and to take God at his word and that his promises are for each in the group personally, and to be gracious to others.

## **The Test of Discipleship**

The test of discipleship is “who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts?” (p. 58). These questions form the basis for this lesson. In the fiercely secular world of Tasmania there are many things that clamor for the heart. The analogy between being a fan of sporting stars and the extensive knowledge of celebrities will be juxtaposed with being a follower of Jesus who is willing to deny self. With Christ dwelling in the hearts of believers through surrender, it will then be possible for him to restore his character within the hearts of the participants and inspire service and not mere compliance as the test of discipleship. The story of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-25) provides the foundation for reflection between being a fan or a follower of Jesus. The key question for participants to reflect on is to apprehend what it would have been like to be a member of the crowd or to be the rich young ruler and to use the imagination as the story unfolded for them as a first timer, and then to reflect on what aspect of this story intersects with their lives today.

## **Growing up in Christ**

It is axiomatic that perpetual immaturity pervades the church and Glenorchy is no exception. Growth can only occur when the soul communes and abides with Christ and this growth can only occur on the safe platform of grace (White, 1892b, p. 69). Too often Christians do not expect change, so the parable of the sower Luke 8:5-15 forms the basis for discussion. The key question for each to answer as to which soil best fits them, hard heart, shallow heart, crowded heart or good soil, and what is God’s invitation to you?

## **The Work and the Life**

To live, as Christ wants one to live in the messiness of everyday life is the core to Christian praxis. This lesson is designed to bring to the fore that the Christian life is characterized by unselfish labor for lost souls, who are growing and have clear spiritual perceptions which can only come from pursuing devotional habits. This lesson will draw on the life experience of Brother Lawrence, and invite reflections on Matthew 5:20-30. The key question for each to reflect on will be to explore what this passage is saying to each and what changes is God inviting us look at in our lives? The practice of praying through the promise of Romans 8:38-39 will be modeled again.

## **A Knowledge of God**

There should always be a proper place for apologetics and knowledge, but the key to knowledge is God desiring to make himself known to all. It is fascinating to note that White clearly states that there is little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures as one can easily fail to see the beauty, and she encourages reflection and memorization. The Scripture for reflection is Ephesians 3:12-21 with the key reflective question “what do I need to change in my life that will allow my roots to grow down deep into his Love? The benefits of reflective reading will be reinforced.

## **The Privilege of Prayer**

“Prayer is the key in the hand of faith to unlock heavens storehouse” (White, 1896, p. 94), yet it is the most neglected and therefore the most challenging discipline. This lesson will explore the challenges of praying to an invisible God, the silence of God and explore the attitudes God desires his followers to have when praying. Matthew 6:5-



13 will be explored and emphasize that motives critical to transformation. It is also critical that our prayers do not focus on self, and so praise will be unpacked. We are to express praise adoration and exaltation to God. Adoration is important for adoration always leads to submission (Kidder, 2009, p. 27). Closing will be by praying through the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9-13).

### **What to do With Doubt and Rejoicing in the Lord Always.**

For the final week, there will be a change of location from the church to home with supper to celebrate and reflect on the 12 weeks the group has journeyed together. A summary of where the group has come from and its purpose will be looked at. Due to the preceding meal no transition question will be discussed and the group will reflect on Philippians 4:4-9 and what it means to rejoice in the face of suffering. Paul wrote this while he was in prison and his life was soon to end, but despite his circumstances he was still able to counsel all to "rejoice in the Lord" (Phil 4:4), and to be content in the service of Christ (White, 1892b, p. 124) despite the vicissitudes of life. In our journey all will face doubts and trials, but Ellen White closes with the joy of the inheritance to come that "the soul redeemed and cleansed from sin, with all its noble powers dedicated to the service of God is of surpassing worth; and there is joy in heaven in the presence of God and the holy angels over one soul redeemed" (White, 1892b, p. 126). Many would agree that there is no amount of money worth exchanging for the soul. However, many will do so for a lifestyle. Staying on the path and seeking his kingdom first and foremost is our first priority.

## **Evaluation**

Evaluation of the small groups will be followed up immediately with personal interviews to understand how their spiritual life was impacted if at all. The interview questions are designed to understand how their spiritual lives have changed, how their devotional habits have changed and to share any benefits they might have gained through the experience. Also, to discover how the small group experience has helped or hindered their spiritual experience. A questionnaire could measure more accurately percentile growth, but perceptions feedback from an interactive interview could yield more personal results that questionnaires are able to. However, interviews cannot measure skewed results as to whether participants accurately reflect their spiritual practices in order to impress the interviewer or disguise secrets.

## **Conclusion**

Seventh-day Adventists are called to worship God in Spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). Adventists have emphasized the “truth” in worship, but have tended to neglect the “Spirit” side. To meld the two in a balanced manner is no easy task. The challenges that have emerged from the NCD results are significant and though not unique to Glenorchy, they have been present for almost two decades. While there is no single program to instill spiritual growth and discipleship to arrest perpetual immaturity, nor is spiritual growth linear and predictable, the reflection on scripture has proven to have the greatest impact on spiritual maturity and the best environment to learn reflection on scripture are small groups. The addition of *Steps to Christ* provided structure and the necessary elements for a balanced discipleship curriculum and help to mitigate any concerns participants might have with a new program.

The discipleship process has no ending and is always ongoing, and therefore small groups must continue the teaching of devotional habits, with a primary focus on reflection on scripture. Nurturing through small groups must not be an end in itself. Opportunities to serve through the ADRA opportunity shop, evangelism and service to the community must also be made available. To ensure discipleship does not become too narrow there needs to be a team who can take charge of various ministries where coaching is made available to leaders who are trained to hone and ensure the ministry continues when a leader steps aside. There is resistance to small groups and more research needs to be done to uncover the reason for this resistance, despite the need for spirituality and loving relationships and to better understand the dynamics of small groups in the Australian context. Participants were happy to participate and share to a certain degree but there is an invisible “barrier” to which participants will not walk through and further insight on this dynamic would assist to hone process and curricular for small groups.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF RESEARCH OUTCOMES

#### **Introduction**

This project sought to redress two main challenges facing the Glenorchy church. First, the profound need to engage experientially with God on a daily basis. Second, the need to foster loving relationships among church members. The project endeavored to embody discipleship that utilizes *STC* and pertinent Scripture as its foundation for each session. To incarnate discipleship experientially devotional habits will be modeled that can be windows into God's transformational presence.

Discipleship is an ongoing process at Glenorchy, and although small groups form only one component of the overall strategy for discipleship, small groups are nonetheless essential. Small groups are not new, but what makes these small groups different is they are fashioned to foster sapience that combines knowledge with the modeling of devotional habits, particularly reflective reading. The andragogy teaching style takes advantage of process that fosters an environment conducive to experience God and build community. Evaluations of this project will be limited to the outcomes from the small groups.

#### Description of the Research Methodology Used

From the 30 members who participated in the church camp, only 15 joined the small group and therefore any evaluation precludes a quantitative methodological approach. Further, the very dynamics of a small group and the desired outcomes sought would necessitate that qualitative research method be more appropriate. The advantage

with a focus group model is the ability to better understand the dynamics and experiences of a group. Morgan (1998, p. 12) outlines three essential elements of qualitative research for focus group research (a) exploration and discovery, (b) context and depth, and (c) interpretation,” and it is this broad framework that will be utilized to generate insights by way of interviews (Appendix A). It is recognized that the responses to the interview are subjective, but an overly rationalistic view imposed on the findings is not necessarily helpful when evaluating spiritual growth.

Exploration and discovery will outline the broad framework for the small group and context and depth will be evaluated from interviews and personal insights in five key areas: (a) Devotional habits; (b) Steps to Christ; (c) Andragogy teaching style; (d) Community; (e) Intentionality; with a final overall evaluation and personal outcomes.

This research is indebted to the participants and their faithfulness of their attendance, however, it is mentioned that the outcomes of this study are limited by their honesty from the interviewee and the effort invested prior and during each session. The context of the small groups will be outlined as to how depth was fostered.

### **Exploration and Discovery**

Small groups are excellent environments to explore, catalyze and stimulate a new vision of spirituality. It is often the unpredictable nature of exploration within small groups that makes them intriguing for all. For this to occur a framework is necessary. Each session was 90 minutes that would start and finish at the agreed time. On the first night, the format was explained and then the values of openness, honesty, sensitivity, confidentiality, and the importance of sharing personal experiences, rather than someone else’s story were discussed and collectively agreed on. It was outlined that participants

were allowed to leave or join during the first three weeks and after the third week the group would become closed and a commitment to attend each session was sought. To atomize unspoken concerns, it was stressed that doctrine is crucial to the foundation of Adventism but must coalesce with spirituality to nourish and imbue the soul so the practice of the Christian life can flourish.

Each lesson began with prayer followed by a transitional question, related to the topic of the evening to assist participants to transition from the day's activities to what is happening in the room by sharing personal story. "Stepping into Scripture" followed and dovetailed into the chapter on *STC*. The three broad questions for reflective reading: (a) what the scripture is saying? (b) what it is saying to me, and (c) what is God's invitation to me?, was explained and modeled. The first question was content oriented, while the last two were transformative questions that connected scripture with the quotidian daily life that potentially opened the heart to nudges or impressions from the Spirit. For variety, the last two questions were changed depending on the pericope or parable used. For instance, if a parable was used, each was to identify with a character and imagine how aspects of that character intersected with their lives that ultimately provided intra-personal insights (See Appendix B for an example of a Study Guide used).

The next section examined a chapter from *Steps to Christ* which all were asked to read carefully and reflect beforehand on the assigned chapter and highlight significant sections that would form the basis for sharing. Group members were counseled to resist the temptation to quickly read the chapter if it appeared too rudimentary. This formed the basis of the framework and now the outcomes from the small groups will be evaluated.

## **Outcomes and Evaluation**

The qualitative outcomes of community and spirituality from the small group was evaluated through five different categories; (a) Devotional habits; (b) Steps to Christ; (c) Andragogy teaching style; (d) Community; and (e) Intentionality; and concluded with a final evaluation of the project. Devotional habits, particularly reflective reading, and *STC* were the main mechanisms used to facilitate and generate outcomes and was evaluated initially, while the Andragogy teaching style evaluated the environmental factors conducive to community and spirituality. To evaluate spirituality is highly subjective, and so “intentionality” was chosen to evaluate spirituality. Intentionality is the main internal driver to seek the presence of God’s Kingdom through devotional habits. Each of these categories was informed from interviews and personal insights.

### **Devotional Habits**

A variety of habits were taught, canvassed, and modeled including prayer, solitude, praying through promises, and journaling, but reflective reading formed the basic structure for the small group and therefore will comprise most of the analysis.

Participants revealed they engaged in a variety of devotional habits. Five members stated that reflection and reflective reading was helpful and three members used reflective reading for their main devotional habit. Of the five members, two found journaling benefited their reflections. Another two connected with God through knowledge by completing the Sabbath School lesson and for them “knowledge was the key to devotions.” Another two identified prayer as their main devotional habit, silence and solitude were the primary devotional habits for another two. Others were more spontaneous and enjoyed a variety while another two found devotionals difficult and did

not have a favorite. With the wide variety of personalities and age range from 23 to 80, this highlighted the variety of pathways members choose to connect with God, and it also suggests they utilized pathways most favored to them. While the quality of their private devotions is unknown, it was disappointing that reflective reading and particularly the Bible did not feature more prominently. In fact, three members stated forthrightly they found the Bible overwhelming. How did the members respond to reflective reading?

Reflective reading formed the skeleton for “Stepping into Scripture.” Half of the participants had difficulty comprehending reflective reading, particularly the last two questions (What is God saying to me? and What is God’s invitation to me?). This was demonstrated by a discernable decline in discussion that marked a number of sessions. Several participants verbalized difficulty with the nature of the “invitation,” for instance during the second session one remarked after an awkward silence, “perhaps there is no invitation,” and wanted to answer both questions at once. While this was disappointing, was this lack of engagement with reflective reading due to the teaching content, their worldview, over-scheduling, or satisfaction with current spirituality and practices? It is difficult to answer with certainty, however since the group was more comfortable with the first question, this does suggest it is easier for the group to process information than spirituality. Further, it is interesting to note that with the exception of one, all who had difficulty with reflective reading were in the 40-55 age range and born Adventists while the three members who incorporated reflective reading regularly were in their early twenties. This suggests that younger postmoderns are more open to new ideas and desire a different kind of spirituality than current Adventism offers, while older members defaulted to more familiar devotional practices.



Devotional habits and reflection on Scripture requires intentionality and the investment of time in worship and an extended discussion on intentionality will occur below. The interviews revealed that devotional time competed with daily life, “life is so cluttered and busy” or “I quickly looked at the text beforehand,” is indicative of the challenge to reflect sufficiently. This reinforced the prior notion that the spiritual journey is often an adjunct to the quotidian life and although God speaks to people in a variety of ways this suggests members default to easier less time consuming devotions.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly older members expressed concerns with reflective reading. Three older participants questioned the validity of reflective reading and another two questioned forthrightly “if we were on the right track?” Direct concern was expressed about God speaking directly to a person with the perceived concomitant decline in the use of knowledge. They feared that reflection potentially had a myopic focus on self that can lead to applications beyond the intention of the biblical text. Objectors agreed that God speaks through Scripture but only in the context of distilled truth and knowledge for “knowledge is the key to character change,” The critical question emerges “Does this truncate the Spirit’s ability to transform by minimization of the transformative questions?” This question will be discussed when “intention” is examined.

Reflection is imperative to engage experientially and apprehend meta-narrative concepts, and so it was gratifying that one young person stated that reflective reading was “most helpful” and was “amazed that God spoke to him through scripture” and consequently his journey became more personal. Another young person stated she found the three questions very helpful to her. Her journey with God was a “lot of work but

rewarding,” and insightfully added that it forced her to “grapple with the text.” Another participant expressed that he meditated and reflected more to uncover sin in his life and rediscovered how to talk to God.

Overall, the practice of devotions beforehand was inconsistent for most members, with only a minority of members who practiced regular devotions. However, everyone reported the reinforcement and increase in frequency of devotions following the small groups. One person joyfully stated he had “acquired a devotional life.”

### Steps to Christ

The risk with utilizing *Steps to Christ* was its lack of newness and freshness. It was hoped for all to acquire a new freshness from *STC* and assuage any cynicism toward White’s writings. This would be challenging, for at least a third of the members were anti-White, another third was ambivalent, and one third were positive towards her. All but four members had read the book, but none in recent times. I was concerned that some would feel *STC* was too basic for well-established Adventists. Three individuals did verbalize this at various times. One stated she took until the third chapter to engage with her book.

Over the course of the small group the book provided the basis for intriguing conversations that complemented “Stepping into Scripture.” Participants were asked what area they highlighted in the chapter and to share any reasons for the highlighted section. This sharing helped to unlock the profundity in her book that provided rich insights for others in the group.

All the members expressed how they enjoyed the experience of reading her book, sharing and hearing each other’s insights and felt they benefited spiritually. It was

heartening that several people, who had a very negative and legalistic view, were now positive toward her writings. One person remarked that he “came to a new appreciation of her grace,” while another, “saw a different side to her and not doom and gloom.” One young person, who was anti-White due to his upbringing, stated emphatically that he “loved it and got a lot out of it.” A light came on for him regarding repentance and forgiveness. Another participant simply enjoyed the devotional approach to her book. Ironically, the person who expressed strong reservations to reflective reading enjoyed “noticing concepts” and found the experience “refreshing” and “profound.” Others commented, “We just scratched the surface.” A participant who had not read it for over 30 years stated it “had more meaning this time round.” A different participant commented that “direct applications and teaching were helpful.” A young person said he appreciated more clearly the importance of repentance and experienced the relief of forgiveness. One member, who stated openly he was “in a valley spiritually” said it was “a ray of sunshine.”

It was heartening that all gained a deeper experience from her book and that it initiated spontaneous sharing in the group that can only come from group process. One person remarked he read the chapter quickly beforehand but the sharing provided clarity to her teachings. This suggests that prior reading even if done quickly, combined with group process of mutual discovery can assist to deepen the experience from *STC* by sensing the nudging of God. Each person found different chapters that deepened their spirituality. For instance, a participant who had difficulty with prayer found the chapter on prayer helpful, while others found chapters on confession, consecration and

repentance to be particularly helpful. Another discovered the devotional benefits from reading her book. These responses seem to endorse the efficacy of *STC* in small groups.

Initial prejudices were overcome. In-depth discussions arose from each chapter. Members came to appreciate with freshness the profundity of her book. These results suggest that when used devotionally and in groups *STC* can become an important element in the curricula for discipleship.

### Andragogy Teaching Style

Evaluation of the teaching style is based on the teaching method itself and the ability to combine artemenic theology or sapience that connects both mentally and emotionally. A key to the andragogy method is to allow collective learning through fostering process. Though Morgan (1998, p. 12) suggests that focus groups can be used to learn about topics poorly understood, this can easily lead to rudderless sessions that can frustrate participants. To give direction and minimize frustration, a framework is necessary.

A key function of facilitation is to foster openness and encourage personal sharing in a way that mere dissemination of information does not. Prior preparation and reflection provides insights that allows for a staggered flow of information, open ended questions, and personal sharing that keeps in tension spontaneity, group needs and learning.

The level of sharing reported by the group suggests that the right ingredients were present. However, two participants at the interview rightly expressed frustrations that discussion became entrenched during the prior segments which truncated time to examine *STC* during a couple of sessions. Yet, a critical technique is to balance the judicious art

of interspersing new information into the discussion to collectively process new information with the need to move the discussion forward to other topics. With hindsight, this balance was not always achieved.

Discussion technique is only one aspect. How did sharing foster sapience? Sharing of personal story is critical to build intensity that connects knowledge with the emotions. Each meeting enjoyed an excellent level of intensity. For instance, during the fifth meeting the group reflected on Ephesians 2:1-10 where God's grace and his merciful attribute was labored over. One person shared that when she lost her baby she wondered whether God loved her, and the anger she experienced allowed others to divulge. Another shared about her anger in her journey through terminal illness. She often experienced low moments, but she was able to say authentically how God was with her through her battle. Another participant bemoaned, "We are not free to talk about anger toward God." What was striking about this exchange was the diversity of experiences that challenged God's grace in daily life. The intensity that built up allowed Ephesians 2:8 "For it is by grace you have been saved" to be applied individually to their experiences. This Bible verse is well known, but to hear this verse read with their names attached to the text allowed them to be imbued with the beauty of his grace despite their circumstances. This was a powerful moment in which one could observe on the faces a sense of relief that grace did extend to them personally in their context. All knew and understood that they were saved by grace but what made the difference? The personalization of grace is critical but the imbuelement of grace came from the sharing of real and uncontrived stories in a group process that connects teaching with real life experiences allowing sapience to emerge.

Personal sharing was an overwhelmingly positive experience for the community and affirms the andragogy teaching style assisted to foster personal sharing. One person who values his privacy was “shocked that he shared so deeply.” Another stated sharing inspired and encouraged her.” However, while the sharing was robust it can be a passive experience spiritually. One can turn up to a meeting with little preparation and investment and still share openly which enhances community, but can impoverish spirituality. Consequently, there was an intriguing invisible barrier that could not be crossed and this will be discussed in the section on Intention. For now, community will be evaluated.

### Community

How do you evaluate community in a small group? Harder (2013) provides a very useful insight that church community is built through shared story. Hearing and processing each other’s story allows opportunity to formulate their own identity rather than having their story solely distilled by the Pastor (p.16). Sharing in an atmosphere of mutuality helps to processes and test worldview and reinforces a sense of self in a way that is not possible in an information-intensive world.

All the participants remarked positively in their interviews to the experience of fellowship created by hearing one another’s unmasked story. Thus, on the concluding night there was a sense of loss and grieving “what are we going to do now?” Many were eager for a new group to start. Several remarked on how surprised they were with the openness of the group and all remarked that hearing each other’s struggles encouraged them in their own challenges. One outgoing young person, who found the sharing from others refreshing and encouraging surprisingly revealed that he had to force himself to

share for he was raised not to show emotion or share personal issues. It was striking that he also experienced cognitive dissonance from people whom he placed on a pedestal when he realized they were facing spiritual challenges similar to him. However, when he viewed this from a meta-perspective he then found the sharing of personal story inspirational and unifying. These shared experiences in the small group creates a sense of community. The enjoyment expressed by participants highlights the need for such groups. It was heartening to notice this sense of community and warmth rippled outside the group into the church. There was a noticeable increase in friendliness and warmth amongst the group and toward others.

As previously mentioned, intensity is built upon authentic sharing which provides teaching moments combining emotional impact with knowledge. During the third session, an extensive discussion surrounded Psalm 51:1-10 over the sin and forgiveness of David. Intensity increased with the third question, “what is God’s invitation to you?” An enlightening comment came when someone stated “I cannot see God as a loving and forgiving God because of my father.” The attention of all were arrested when he added, “the tape of [of sin] was replayed over and over again” and then echoed verse 3 “it haunts me day and night.” This became the catalyst to an extended discussion. Seeking how to resolve this, the focus of the group turned to verse 1 as the invitation God has extended to all “because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins.” The unexpected response came “I still see God through my natural father.” The benefits of spontaneity came in response to this with the following rejoinder “but the invitation is” referring to verse 1 “Your unfailing love.” While the objection that he sees God through his father was repeated so was “but the invitation is.” This banter was repeated twice more with

“but the invitation is.” The resultant intensity had a visible effect on the group as it dawned on them with an increasing veracity the personal nature of God’s invitation. Through this exchange genuine empathy was conveyed which is fruitage of community. What made this exchange so significant was this person valued highly his privacy and the efficacy of knowledge, which intensified authenticity and intensity that are all community building elements. The sharing of unmasked stories were powerful moments that built community that is difficult to duplicate in other settings.

Community is an essential environmental factor that fosters spirituality, discipleship and sapience. The fruitage of community, compassion and empathy were often expressed to participants and it was gratifying to observe the increase in warmth toward each other over the course of the small group that overflowed to other settings. Formation happens in community. However, one can attend and share deeply with little spiritual investment beforehand and so there is an additional layer that is critical to formation. Intentionality or “holy intent” is the main driver to “seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness” (Matt 6:33). How did the group progress in this area?

### Intentionality

It has been argued that the critical ingredient to follow Jesus is the “honest intention” to seek and follow him. Intentionality and effort are essential ingredients for the process of discipleship to be operational. Effort is required to prioritize sufficient time for worship and to pursue devotional habits amongst the busyness of everyday life that has an important impact on the quality of worship and formation.

At the start of the small group a commitment to attend all sessions was elicited and agreed upon. Commitment in general to the small group was very good, with only



one who elected to drop out completely, and one other attended only one third of the meetings while 85% of the group attended for 75% of the meetings or more. The reasons why some could not come every night ranged from personal commitments, illness, contractual and work commitments.

Intention to attend is crucial for small group experience, but is only one layer. Participants were required to reflect beforehand on a passage of Scripture and a chapter of *Steps to Christ*. Each session the group unpacked the three basic questions of reflective reading as outlined earlier. Effort to reflect during private devotions is critical to open the window into God's presence and to bring sapience to scripture. A significant number (42%) indicated they either did not do the reading or read it quickly beforehand. This corresponded with the commensurate decline in discussion on the transformative questions. It is noteworthy that with the exception of two members of the group each of them cited poor motivation as the factor that hindered regular devotions. Factors mentioned included "procrastination," "lack of time," television," "laziness," "don't feel like it." Another participant felt it was "like an English assignment and like homework." Another person rushed worship "to get it over and done with." Although one person realized that effort is required, he paradoxically felt the relationship with God should grow naturally and thereby require no effort and "just happen." Another two members cited their respective vocations as a barrier. This suggests these hindering forces are in play impoverishing the quality of devotions, which is reflected in the commensurate decline in group discussion of the transformative questions. This infers most participants spent inadequate time in reflection and therefore suggests the majority struggle with

spirituality amongst the clutter of daily life. How is this to be understood when paradoxically all had reported an increase in devotions?

A deeper but more implicit layer emerges when confronted with an invisible wall during the small groups. People were willing to share and share deeply, and willing to read *STC* and the assigned Bible verses, but there was a strong sense that was as far as they were prepared to explore and divulge spirituality. On four occasions the group members were asked to journal their thoughts, but only one member responded positively to journaling. On the sixth session, the group members were asked to journal their thoughts on how the characters in the parable of the prodigal son intersected with their lives, but no one journaled their thoughts. The seventh session pads and pens were provided with the intention to journal with sharing in a group to follow and as the pads were placed on the floor a participant expressed apprehensively, “oh we are not going to write something are we?” This seemed to capture the unspoken tension in the room and so the activity, without comment, did not proceed. One member remarked later during the interview that he was relieved that the activity did not proceed. This suggested the group did not want to invest beyond what the group was currently doing. This was reinforced when I privately canvassed with a member of the group about introducing accountability partners and it was agreed this would be unwise, with no reasons discussed. I instinctively knew this would be his response due to the invisible wall.

There is perhaps a multiplicity of reasons to explain this invisible wall. The invisible wall was noticed during the sessions and the interviews that were punctuated, at times, by clipped and/or clichéd answers to the interview questions. It has already been observed that most are more comfortable with propositional theology since it is easier to

unpack and share. Although participants were willing to explore spirituality in community, this invisible wall may reinforce Barna's finding that spirituality is an adjunct to the quotidian life, with the corollary of the subtlety of satisfaction with current spiritual practices. Nonetheless this wall has created the impression of blurred intention to place spirituality at the center. However, there may be a further layer to explain blurred intention.

An intriguing clue may help explain diminishing intention that arose during a forthright exchange over Ephesians 3 in regards to how the roots of God's love might grow deep down in our hearts. Clichés of “prayer” “Bible study” followed and then it was decided that worship was the core response to God. The core motivation to worship was unlocked when one stated, “you have to want to” followed by the unvarnished confession “I often don't feel like it.” The confession allowed others to share that they often too wanted to avoid devotions. This was a turning point that allowed the group to unpack the different barriers to worship. Honesty was affirmed and the suggestion that a prayer to God to request the desire to want to worship that ignited another banter, “but what if you don't want to.” A light-hearted moment came with the rejoinder “pray to God to help me to want to pray and for the desire to worship.” This reveals the struggle that each person faces between pursuing daily tasks or worship. The desire to worship or pursue one's own agenda comes down to surrender. The internal battle to surrender may answer why the main driver of intention becomes blurred in the face of smorgasbord of activity and the pursuit of one's own agenda. This might explain why members tended to default to worship patterns that were most familiar and easiest to practice. This should be

no surprise for White (1892b) stated, “the warfare against self is the greatest battle ever fought” (p. 43), and surrender is the very core of this battle.

There were only two participants who had a consistent worship pattern prior to the commencement of the groups. By the end of the series there were six members of the group who had developed an intentional worship pattern. These participants either used study or reflection as a base for their worship. Their worship pattern was characterized by effort to re-orient their daily lives around devotions or study. This intentionality impacted qualitatively upon their devotional life. For instance, one remarked “I am always doing study,” and took time to wrestle with Scripture. Several enjoyed the experience of reflection on scripture and “reading scripture, pulling it apart and understanding what it is saying.” Another participant enjoyed “grappling with the text” in her reflection time. The qualitative effect on their devotions was “encouragement from God,” “enjoyment in spending time with God.” One individual reported experiencing catharsis. These participants had a specific morning ritual revolving around solitude in the bedroom, or in bed with a cup of lemon tea and journaled their thoughts and experiences. One person who worked full-time did not hurry her devotional time and used the transformative questions to grapple with the text. What made the difference in her life was that she made spirituality her first priority and consequently remarked she now enjoys reading the Bible and spending time with God. She also had a plan for when she did not feel like worship and she followed a journaling routine that reinforced intentionality. All experience the temptation not to worship, but when the intentionality is operational it is able to transcend the clutter of life. Those who placed worship at the

center showed fruits of love, joy, peace, evangelism, and a commitment regardless of the cost.

It is fascinating to note those six members were in different places on the continuum between knowledge and experiential worship preferences. This perhaps reveals an intriguing link between intentionality and the transformation of character. Transformation happened regardless of orientation on the continuum of worship. This suggests that God honors the honest intent to seek first the Kingdom of God with his transformational presence and thereby determines the quality worship. Also, intentionality helped to jealously guard their worship time in the clutter of life.

Intentionality varied in the group widely from one who finds the devotional life difficult to those who place it at the center of their lives. Those in between placed the devotional life amongst the clutter of everyday activities consequently became an adjunct to other activities. It is clear that intentionality plays a central role that plans for adequate time for devotions, has a routine, a favorite place and time and even has a plan for when one does not feel like worship. For intention to be operational, surrender driven by holy intent determines the quality of the devotional life.

### **Overall Evaluation**

All members of the group were impacted from the authentic disclosure of story that encouraged all in the face of personal challenges. The liberating sense of relief came to most when they realized they were not the only ones struggling and it built community. The warmth expressed toward each other that reverberated beyond the group demonstrated this. The andragogy teaching model assisted in creating an environment for shared story and the teaching of aretogenic theology. The intensity that

built up through sharing during “Stepping into Scripture” and “Steps to Christ” allowed for teaching moments that could not be duplicated in a classroom setting and powerfully connected teaching with emotions that allows for sapience to emerge. Sharing with each other and the intensity generated during a meeting, however, is not necessarily an indicator of increased spirituality, although they are important environmental factors that can foster sapiential growth.

All collectively enjoyed the experience of building community together and saw that small groups offer a setting to learn collectively and explore spirituality. At the end of the small groups most intensified their devotional lives, although the quality of their devotions is unknown. The modeling and teaching of devotional habits and particularly reflective reading were helpful to mostly younger members. However, most of the older members who valued propositional truth struggled with the validity of reflective reading and tended to default to their favored devotional habit. There were a handful of younger people who adopted reflective reading found it more difficult than other devotions, but more rewarding. One of the desired outcomes was qualitative spiritual growth. However due to the confluence of the clutter of life and over-scheduling, a significant number hurried their reflection time that perhaps indicated blurred intention to the practice of devotional habits. This also suggested there is a battle to surrender that ultimately can impoverish spirituality. Those who placed God at the center of their lives, were very intentional with their devotional life with a regular ritual of time, place, and had a contingency if they did not want to worship. In these cases, God’s transformational presence was demonstrated by their fruits and arose regardless of where they were on the continuum between knowledge and reflection.

## **Conclusion**

There are a multifarious number of elements and drivers that interact simultaneously with believers that affect the results of discipleship. It was the contention of this project that there is one driver above all else that must be fostered and nurtured and that is the holy intent to pursue God, even when one has found him. Holy intent is characterized by the desire to “seek the Kingdom of God above all else” (Matt 6:33 NLT) God desires discipleship to be a living holy sacrifice (Rom 12:1). Paul admonishes us to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2). The traditional Adventist paradigm for discipleship has relied on normative propositional truths. However, this has given rise to superficiality punctuated by faith immaturity. Formational and normative teaching is imperative; but knowledge is only of penultimate importance to the qualitative relationship with God. An intellectual religion can never cleanse the heart.

The confluence of postmodernity, secularism, and self-idolatry has reshaped spirituality. Spirituality has become increasingly compartmentalized and leading to an impoverished spirituality. All disciples, who desire to rise above the malaise, must move spirituality from being an adjunct to the other pursuits of life, to the center of life. For the relationship to be operational, spiritual union with Christ must be driven by attitudes of surrender, repentance, and consecration. However, underlying everything is motive (Prov 20:27; Jer 17:9-10) governed by the will. Although sin is still a part of this life, the honest intent to follow God regardless of the cost combined with devotional habits of reflective reading, solitude, and prayer that imbues disciples with his presence and transforms the character. Peter’s honest intent to follow Jesus transformed his life despite

his frailties juxtaposed to Judas whose motives were disguised by traitorous, self-seeking desires that ultimately ended in separation from God.

Glenorchy church, in response to its challenges of community and the need to engage experientially with God, adopted a new vision “To Be, To Experience, To Grow thriving followers of Jesus.” A church camp introduced the vision for discipleship combined with sermons, mentoring, training, and small groups. Small Groups potentially are the best environments to explore spirituality to model devotional habits and when combined an andragogy teaching style, they provide a conducive environment to process spirituality collectively and for sapience to emerge. The transitional question helped to model and encourages open sharing that reverberated to “Stepping into Scripture” and “Stepping into Steps to Christ” that helped to unlock the profundity of White’s book. The openness in the group built intensity that connected participants emotionally to teachings. All of the participants seemed to enjoy unvarnished sharing. All members of the small group intensified their devotional life. However, the clutter of life blurred intention, which impacted the quality of the devotional life for most. For those whose spirituality was at the center of their lives, they intentionally quarantined the quotidian devotional life from clutter of life. God honored this critical motivator to divinely interact in their lives that was demonstrated by fruit regardless of where they were on the spectrum of knowledge and experience.

### **Further Areas of Research**

An investigative quantitative and qualitative study of spirituality amongst ministers would be useful. How many ministers who believe and advocate devotional



habits struggle with how to teach and model spirituality? Do the ministers themselves have a vibrant interactive relationship with God or do they simply lack the skills to teach?

Further research into the implementation of a discipleship processes would be useful in larger churches with a team approach. The advantage of a team approach is that a more comprehensive discipleship strategy can be implemented with less ministerial distractions and would have the ability to problem solve challenges as they arise as well as a greater sample pool.

There are multifarious layers that drive seekers to God, but the essential driver is to seek God unconditionally with their hearts (Matt 6:48). The desire to seek can wax and wane according to various winds and currents of the time, although the desire to seek God is as mysterious as the movements of God himself. However, more work needs to be done to better understand environmental factors that congregants and ministers can put in place to provide the best chance to foster the desire to seek God.

While the efficacy of reflection on scripture has been established, this does not appeal to all with the same intensity. Does reflective reading mainly appeal to those with introverted personalities? Further research would be useful to understand how different devotional habits qualitatively grow disciples in relation to their personality type. Should followers practice devotional habits according to their strengths or should they develop their shadow side?

### **Outcomes Personal**

Prior to the program, I knew instinctively that the model of discipleship had gone awry. When Bible studies were conducted, spirituality would be talked about but many would be left with the unspoken question of “how?” The Doctor of Ministry program has

provided a life changing learning environment. The content and practicality of each intensive, combined with different learning environments has helped to create life changing moments that could not be duplicated from reading a book. The program has taught me how to read Scripture and Ellen White's writings devotionally, along with other devotional habits. Most importantly the program has taught me how to teach and model spirituality which has transformed my ministry.

This program has helped to develop a tool and a framework that has transformed Bible studies from mundane doctrinal studies to deep sharing of spiritual journeys. Additionally, it has taught me how to read the Bible and *Steps to Christ* devotionally along with other works. This tool has provided principles that can easily be transposed from one on one to larger groups. The andragogy teaching method of collective and collaborative learning has provided an opportunity to develop skills in facilitating groups that has been useful in many forums to help foster sapience, which has been a blessing.

Currently I am privileged to hold the position of Ministerial Secretary for the Tasmanian Conference. The DMin and this study program has prepared me to dialogue with the ministers in the field about Discipleship and to assist them in learning how to teach and model devotional habits that they will in turn teach others.

Most importantly, it is no longer assumed that the devotional life will be caught. It is now an urgent priority to teach, preach and model biblical spirituality alongside the teachings of the church, which has transformed Bible studies.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How has your view on Spiritual growth changed?
2. Describe in what ways, if any, your devotional habits have changed.
3. Which devotional habit do you find most beneficial and the habit you find least helpful, and what is the reason for that?
4. Please share the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have gained through this experience?
5. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that enhanced your devotional practices?
6. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of devotions?
7. Our growth is not just an individual experience, we grow in community, how has the small group helped or hindered your growth.
8. Many view Steps to Christ basic in our journey with Christ, what things have you learned from her book that has helped, hindered, you in your walk?

## APPENDIX B

### SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE SAMPLE

#### **Study Guide 2: The Sinners Need of Christ**

##### **Introduction**

One of the biggest threat to Christianity are Christians who believe they are Christians but who really do not feel any need of Christ in their day to day life. Therefore, many are not really interested in following Christ. Knowing God experientially is critical if we want to experience God each day. Many are frustrated in their journey with God and want to come closer to him. To deepen our relationship with God, it will cost something and therefore to make room for him in our lives we must not only adjust our lifestyle, our thinking, but also to go back step further to recognize our need for Christ in our lives.

Willard commenting on Christians who are great fans of John 3:16, and it is a great text, but it has fed the notion that all one has to do is simply believe that Jesus died for you sins and paid the penalty and the belief is all that is required, likens these Christians as “Vampire Christians” (Great Omission p.14) who say “I’d like a bit of your blood please. But I don’t care to be a student or have your character.” Many Christians as a result care very little as to how they live, and Willard goes on to colloquially to describe their day to day approach to life, “In fact won’t you excuse me while I get on with my life and I’ll see you in heaven.” Jesus challenges each one of us to live out our Christian life in relationship with Jesus.

Willard (Renovation of the Heart p.13) quotes Edith Schaeffer who Points out: “The philosophy of living with an underlying motive of doing everything for one’s own personal peace and comfort rapidly colors everything that might formerly have come under the headings of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’.”

##### **Transitional Sharing**

What team(s) or sport do you admire the most and why.

What are some things you do to maintain the allegiance to that Club?

##### **Stepping into Scripture**

John 3:3-9

- What does this say
  - How does it connect with my life
  - Is there an invitation
- A) What was Nicodemus thinking? Can you relate to his thinking? Forgiveness and surrender are themes here. Nicodemus needed Christ
- B) You must be born again. When I repeated this 3 or four times – you must be born again, this forced me to ask the question: “If I was born again!” This can only come from above and does not come from mere ideas. We can be a great admirer of Jesus, and not be born again. I cannot be just a fan who loves all the statistics and has all the shirts with the team’s signatures – I have to be on Jesus team and cannot do this from the sideline. Like fans of sporting teams we can be a great admirer of Jesus and teachings and so
- C) Am I born again; and what does being born again look like in our lives? God is inviting me to be Spirit filled Christian that transforms.

What struck me with the text is that we can know that we must experience rebirth, but miss it. Nicodemus did and that is why I must ask am I being renewed by the Spirit each day?

### **Stepping into Steps to Christ**

- What were some statements you noticed in this chapter?
  - What Ellen White is saying?
  - What is she saying to you?
  - What is the invitation?
- 
- Need to rediscover our sense of lostness.
  - Adam and Eve sought to hide from God – more than just feeling guilty like a dog who has done wrong
  - P.17 “Such is still the condition of the un-renewed heart.”

### **Next week’s text**

Ps 51:1-10

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## VITA

Name: Mark Falconer

Date of Birth: July 24 1962

Place of Birth: Christchurch, New Zealand

Married: December 2013 Deborah Falconer

Child(ren): Anthony (1993)

### Education:

2010–2015 D.Min. in Spiritual Formation, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI

2000–2004 M. Ministry (Youth Ministry), cumulative G.P.A. of 3.7., Avondale College

1988-1993 Bachelor of Arts, Theology, Summa Cum Laude, Avondale College

### Ordination:

1999 Ordained to the Seventh-day Adventist Gospel Ministry

### Experience:

2011 – Pres.: Field Pastor Glenorch and Collinsvale Church Tasmanian Conference, Ministerial Secretary

2008 –2010 Associate Director Youth and Family Ministries New Zealand Pacific Union Conference

2006-2007 Director Youth, Family, Children Ministries South New South Wales Conference

2001-2005 Associate Youth Pastor Rockhamton, Yeppoon, Emerald SDA Churches,

1994-2000 Pastor, Invercargil, Dunedin, City Wide Youth Leader, Pastor Papanui Church

